





PLAGUE  
AND  
PESTILENCE

RAYMOND  
CRAWFURD

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THE  
PREFACE



PLAGUE  
AND  
PESTILENCE  
IN  
LITERATURE AND ART



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PLAGUE  
AND  
PESTILENCE  
IN  
LITERATURE AND ART

BY  
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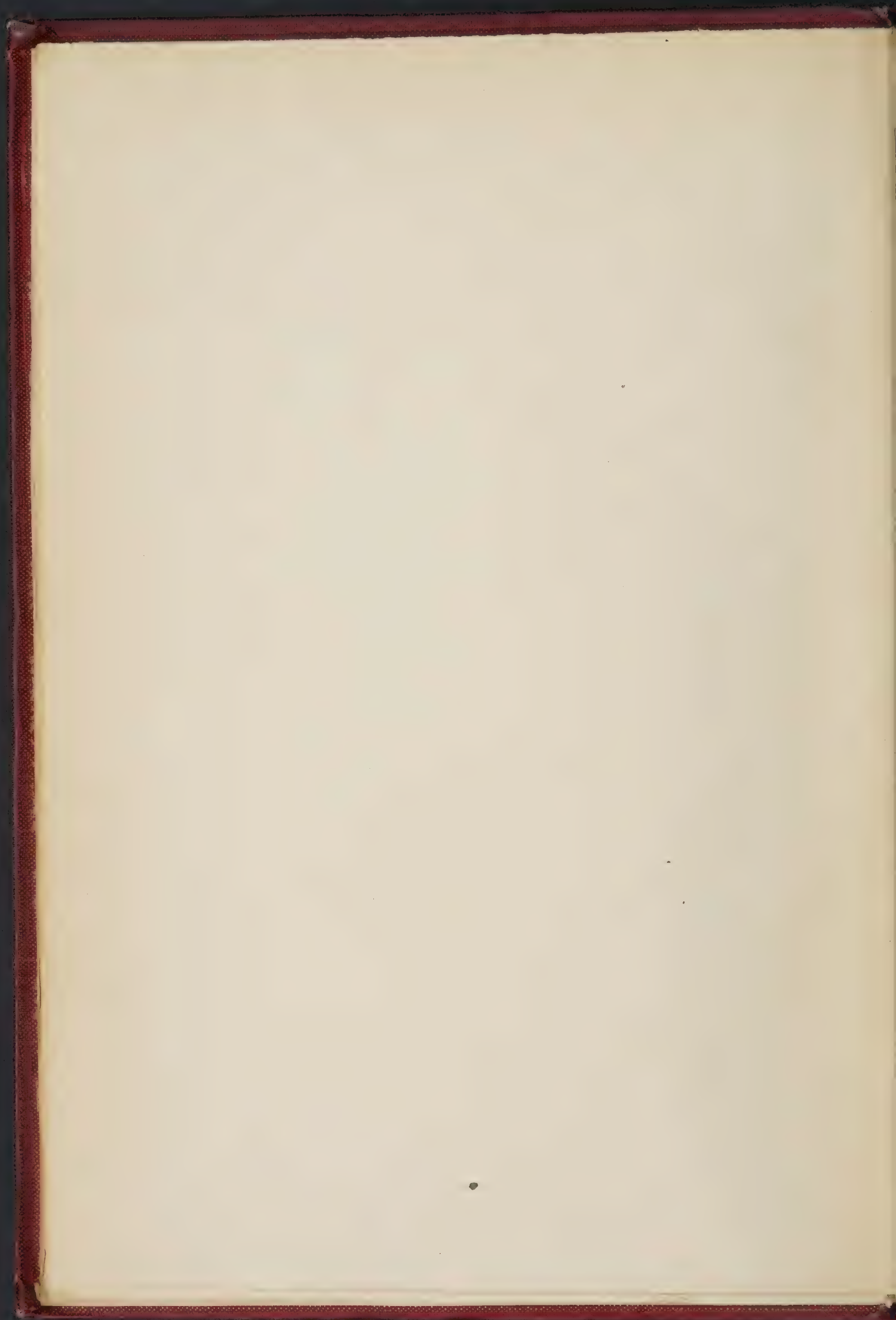


## PREFACE

THIS volume represents substantially the FitzPatrick Lectures which I had the privilege of delivering at the Royal College of Physicians in 1912. Originally I intended to do no more than gather together into a succinct record the various memorials and reminders of Pestilence that I had met with in my wanderings at home and abroad and in my casual incursions into general literature. Insensibly the desire to understand supplanted the desire merely to record, and the desire to explain superseded the endeavour to understand. I have turned my attention, as far as practicable, only to the literary and artistic associations of Pestilence, but these have inevitably overlapped the confines of history and of medical science. The latter territory has been invaded only so far as was necessary to ensure a correct orientation to the inquiry. I have thought it wise to let the curtain fall at the end of the eighteenth century, leaving it to my readers to decide what vestiges of the mentality of distant centuries have survived into this twentieth. A little reflection on this will afford a most salutary lesson to all of us.

*January 1914.*







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## CHAPTER I

THE scattered records of literature afford a valuable, but neglected, contribution to the study of epidemic pestilence. They show us pestilence as an affair of the mind, as medical literature has shown it as an affair of the body. They teach us too the humiliating lesson that, in spite of the progress of civilization, in spite of the apparent growth of humanity, in spite of the development and dissemination of scientific knowledge, human nature has again and again reverted to the primitive instincts of savagery in face of the crushing calamity of epidemic pestilence. The superficial student of psychology may find it difficult to believe that, so late as 1630 in Milan, so late as 1656 in Naples, so late as 1771 in Moscow, the blood-lust of a maddened populace sought and found a sedative in an orgy of human sacrifice. But so it was. And in this homing instinct of the human mind is to be found the clue to much in the records of literature and art that else is wholly meaningless. It is a grim chapter of history that lies before us, but maybe we shall find here and there some spiritual Bethel reared out of the hard stones on which suffering humanity has lain its weary head.

The mind of primitive man conceives no power over nature higher than his own : so is his attitude conditioned to disease. He sees in disease only some evil magic, exercised by man on man. The Australian native believes that the assailant transmits disease by pointing some object at his victim, who in turn looks to magic to free him from the disease. In the New Hebrides the idea still persists that the aggressor shoots some charmed material at the victim by means of



bow and arrow. Medicine has not yet emerged from magic. The human mind, as it passes to higher stages of enlightenment, does not wholly discard its primitive beliefs: of this we find abundant testimony in early records of pestilence. In Pharaoh's plagues mark the importance of the manual acts, the stretching out of the rod, the smiting of the dust, the sprinkling of ashes. Again, when the Philistines of Ashdod ask for deliverance from plague, the diviners enjoin them to make images of their emerods, or swellings. This is crude magic—imitative magic—the essence of which is that any effect may be produced by imitating it. It is the spirit in which a savage sprinkles water when he wishes rain to fall.

As his own impotence is borne in on man, he comes to look beyond himself alike for the cause and cure of his disease; but human agency still bounds his whole horizon. He looks to those likest himself in nature, the imperishable spirits of his own departed dead. Endued with bodily form, their ghosts need offerings of food and drink, and humble homage of prayer. Neglect of these is recompensed by the sending of sickness and death. This cult prevailed in the religion of young Rome and in the Greek worship of beings of the underworld (*χθόνιοι*), and may be found to-day in Oceania. Such a deified spirit of the dead might exert his influence in dreams to those who slept over his abode. Such is the germ of the incubation ritual of the demigod Asclepius, who revealed remedies for sickness, and was invoked for deliverance from pestilence. Strabo says that Tricca in Thessaly was the oldest sanctuary of Asclepius, who was the deified ancestor of the Phlegyae and Minyae, the ruling family of Tricca.

With the emergence of the idea of a separable soul came the belief in its assumption after death of animal forms, and chief of these the mysterious earth-dwelling serpent, darting pestilence from his barbed tongue. The association of the



serpent with disease and pestilence is wellnigh world-wide. The Vedas teem with it : classical and Christian literature and art are full of it. We find it in Ovid,<sup>1</sup> in Gregory of Tours,<sup>2</sup> in Paul the Deacon,<sup>3</sup> and in many other writers. The Book of Numbers too (xxi. 6 seq.) retains this imagery of pestilence : ‘ And the Lord sent fiery serpents among the people, and they bit the people ; and much people of Israel died. Therefore the people came to Moses, and said, We have sinned, for we have spoken against the Lord, and against thee ; pray unto the Lord, that he take away the serpents from us. And Moses prayed for the people. And the Lord said unto Moses, Make thee a fiery serpent, and set it upon a pole : and it shall come to pass, that every one that is bitten, when he looketh upon it, shall live. And Moses made a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, and it came to pass, that if a serpent had bitten any man, when he beheld the serpent of brass, he lived.’ Imitative magic—the healing of like by like—is still the weapon with which Moses counters the pestilence.

In Fernando Po,<sup>4</sup> when an epidemic breaks out among children, it is customary to set up a serpent’s skin on a pole in the middle of the public square, and the mothers bring their infants to touch it. In Madagascar, Sibree<sup>5</sup> found that Ramahavaly, the god of healing, was also the patron of serpents, and was able to employ them as agents of his anger. In many parts of India also it is customary to make a serpent of clay or metal, and offer sacrifices to it on behalf of the sufferer.<sup>6</sup> Apollonius of Tyana also is said to have freed Antioch from scorpions by making a bronze image of a scorpion and burying it under a small pillar in the middle

<sup>1</sup> *Metamorphoses*, vii. 520.

<sup>2</sup> *Hist. Francorum*, x. 1.

<sup>3</sup> *De Gestis Langobardorum*, iii. 24.

<sup>4</sup> A. Bastian, *Ein Besuch in San Salvador*, p. 318 ; and Frazer, *Commentary on Pausanias*, ii. 10. 3.

<sup>5</sup> *The Great African Island*, p. 268.

<sup>6</sup> Gordon Cumming, *In the Hebrides*, pp. 53 seq.



of the city. So the serpent has power not only to excite pestilence, but also to avert it.

From these spirits of the nether world, human or animal in form, it is a short passage to the conception of supernatural beings above the earth, but still in human shape and still with human attributes. Such are Apollo, Asclepius, and Rudra. Traces of the evolution of these deities are usually to be found in the attributes with which they are endowed in later literature and art. The usual symbol of Asclepius is a serpent coiled round a staff. Sacred snakes were kept in his temples,<sup>1</sup> and applicants for healing fed them with cakes.<sup>2</sup> Cures were frequently effected in the sanctuaries of Asclepius by serpents stealing out and licking the wounds of patients. The god-man finally supersedes the serpent, but conservative religious sentiment retains the older object of worship as the symbol and associate of the new. In Greek legend it is the serpent from which Asclepius learns the art of healing: true, Homer makes Chiron his teacher. Numerous other legends of the serpent origin of medicine survive. Polyindus the seer is said to have learnt the herbs that can restore men to life by observing how the serpents raised their dead to life. In Cashmere<sup>3</sup> the descendants of the Naga (serpent) tribes attribute their special skill in healing to knowledge bestowed on their ancestors by serpents: and the Celts acquired their medical lore from drinking serpent broth. As with Asclepius, so also we shall see with Apollo. Apollo in very truth slays the man-killing Python, and himself becomes also the sender of pestilence. He not only smites with disease the doer of evil, but wards it off from the upright. His are the arrows that scatter plague: but he is also the best of physicians. Such is the Apollo of the *Iliad*.

Homer's<sup>4</sup> aged priest Chryses, when he calls upon Apollo

<sup>1</sup> Aristophanes, *Plutus*, 733.

<sup>2</sup> Frazer, *Pausanias*, ii. 2. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Gordon Cumming, *loc. cit.*

<sup>4</sup> *Iliad*, i. 44 seq.



PLATE I (Face Page 4)



Apollo with Bow and Mouse

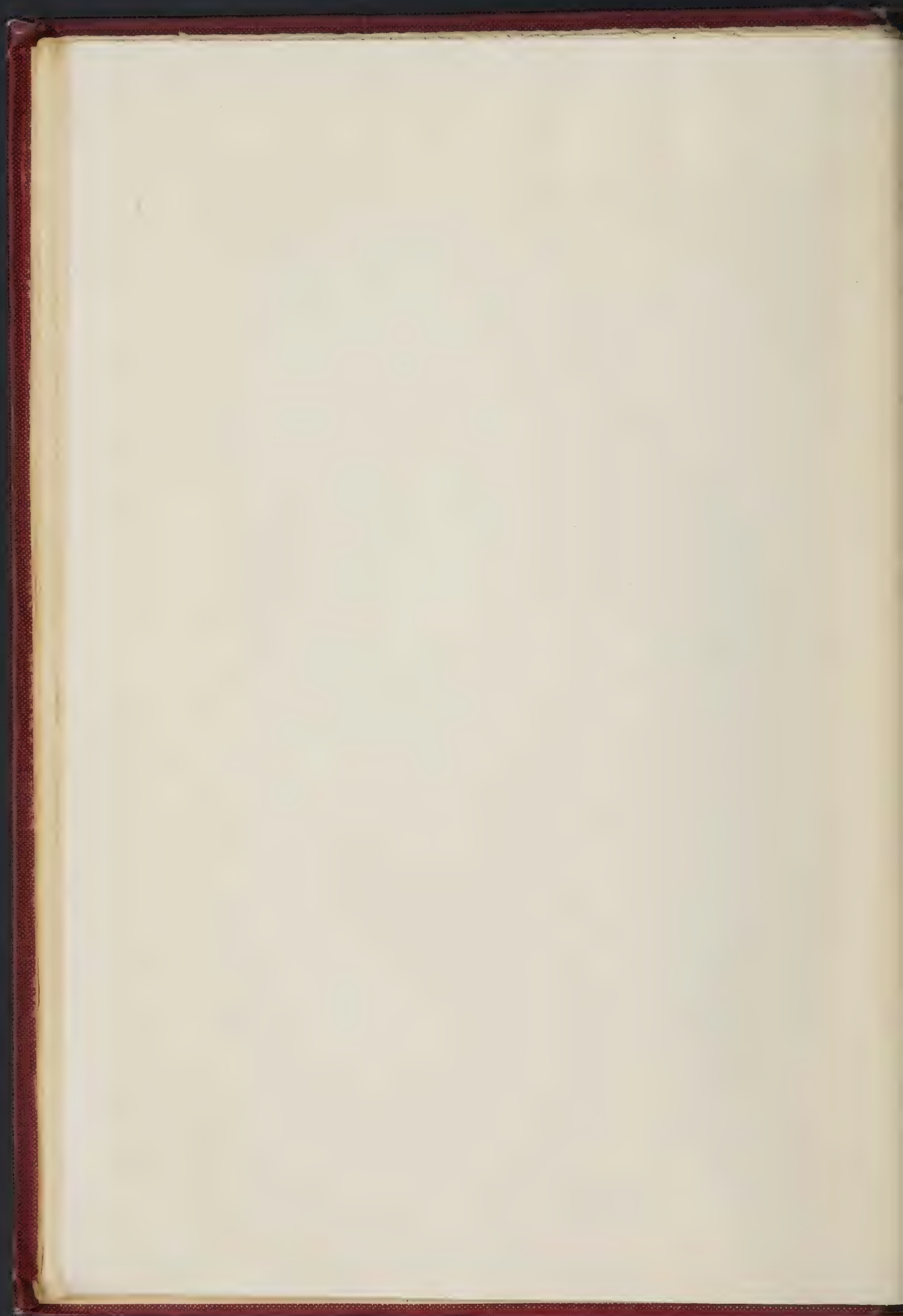
Asclepius with Serpent

Serpent and Galley

Christ on the Cross

The Brazen Serpent







to avenge the ravishing of his daughter, invokes him as God of the Silver Bow (*Ἀργυρότοξος*). Apollo hears his prayer, and

Down from Olympus' heights he passed, his heart  
 Burning with wrath : behind his shoulders hung  
 His bow and ample quiver : at his back  
 Rattled the fateful arrows as he moved :  
 Like the night-cloud he passed : and from afar  
 He bent against the ships and sped the bolt :  
 And fierce and deadly twanged the silver bow :  
 First on the mules and dogs, on man the last,  
 Was poured the arrowy storm ; and through the camp  
 Constant and numerous blazed the funeral fires.  
 Nine days the heavenly Archer on the troops  
 Hurl'd his dread shafts.<sup>1</sup>

Homer's picture of the Archer Apollo has inspired one at least of the masterpieces of Graeco-Roman sculpture. Apollo the Avenger sends the pestilence in punishment of sin. Homer sets it as a signal evidence of divine displeasure in the forefront of his epic, as does Sophocles after him in the greatest of his tragedies. Apollo is pictured as the god who spreads the plague by arrows shot from his bow. He swoops down with impetuous onset, like the sudden fall of night in Mediterranean lands, as the 'pestilence that walketh in darkness' and 'the arrow that flieth by day'. The plague is first epizootic, falling on mules and dogs, then epidemic among the Greek host. A council is called, and Achilles advises that some prophet or priest be summoned to say what propitiatory sacrifices have been neglected :

If for neglected hecatombs or prayers  
 He blames us : or if fat of lambs and goats  
 May soothe his anger and the plague assuage.

The seer Calchas shows them that it is sent rather as a punishment for flagrant sin, the sin of Agamemnon in carrying off Chryseis. It is for no neglect of honorific sacrifices nor for neglected prayers that pestilence has come

<sup>1</sup> Derby, Homer's *Iliad*.



upon them. Chryseis must be sent back, and expiation be made to Apollo with sacrifices, after the whole host has been purified in the doubly cleansing water of the sea. So Chryseis is sent back and

Next proclamation through the camp was made  
To purify the host ; and in the sea,  
Obedient to the word, they purified :  
Then to Apollo solemn rites performed  
With faultless hecatombs of bulls and goats,  
Upon the margin of the watery waste :  
And wreathed in smoke the savour rose to heaven.

Thus they offer the sacrifice of atonement for sin, with the ablutions meet for a solemn lustration of the people. Then when the plague is stayed, and not till then, may they join in the glad eucharistic feast of meat-offerings and libations of red wine, the whole assemblage taking it in company with the god, crowning the cups with flowers and chanting hymns of praise.

The Apollo of the *Iliad*, like the serpent of old, is not only the sender but also the averter of pestilence.

Homer's plague marks a stage at which prayer and sacrifice have displaced magic in the struggle with pestilence. From this time on the study of pestilence is inextricably blended with that of the evolution of religion. Prayer and sacrifice follow inevitably from the conception of the majestic man-god. He must be approached on bended knee with request for help: his is by right the homage of prayer. His worshipper approaches him as he would an earthly potentate: he cleanses himself, he begs for grace in humble posture, he gives him of his best. Hence arise purification, prayer, and sacrifice. At first, as in Homer, it is the body that is purified: the offering of a clean heart and a right spirit is of later growth. So long as the god is humanly conceived, food and drink will be the meet offerings of sacrifice. Later with the conception of a god dwelling aloft, as in the Homeric verse, the sweet savour of the sacrifice, or of the scented smoke

of incense rising to heaven, will find peculiar favour in his sight. Primitive sacrifice is essentially social : it is a banquet in which the worshippers join in communion with the god : it is the true parent of the *lectisternium*. Early religion has no doubts of the god's good-will, if duly solicited : hence the joyousness of dance and song attendant on the eucharistic feast, the worshippers being convinced that the sacrifice has restored them to the favour of the god. The stern god, the God of the Old Testament, slow to forgive, has no place in primitive theology. Hymns, such as the Greek warriors sang in jubilant unison to Apollo, are the first dim gropings of language into the domains of literature. Paeans of this kind were chanted in the sanctuaries of Asclepius after successful acts of healing.

In early Indian myth Rudra is the god who lets fly the arrows of pestilence. Read this prayer to Rudra from the *Atharvaveda*<sup>1</sup>: there are many like it in the older *Rig-Veda*, which reached near its present form as early as 1500 B.C.

*Prayer to Bhava*<sup>2</sup> and *Sava*<sup>2</sup> for protection from dangers.

1. O Bhava and Sava, be merciful, do not attack us : ye lords of beings, lords of cattle, reverence be to you twain ! Discharge not your arrow even after it has been laid (on the bow) and has been drawn ! Destroy not our bipeds and our quadrupeds.

7. May we not conflict with Rudra, the archer with the dark crest, the thousand-eyed powerful one, the slayer of Ardhaka !

12. Thou, O crested god, carriest in (thy hand) that smites thousands, a yellow golden bow that slays hundreds : Rudra's arrow, the missile of the gods, flies abroad : reverence be to it, in whatever direction from here (it flies).

19. Do not hurl at us thy club, thy divine bolt : be not incensed at us, O lord of cattle ! Shake over some other than us the celestial branch !

<sup>1</sup> VII. xi. 2, tr. Bloomfield.

<sup>2</sup> Synonyms for Rudra.



26. Do not, O Rudra, contaminate us with fever, or with poison, or with heavenly fire : cause this lightning to descend elsewhere than upon us !

Other gods than Rudra can stem the pestilence. ' Vayu [the wind] shall bend the points of the enemies' bows, Indra shall break their arms, so that they shall be unable to lay on their arrows : Aditya [the sun] shall send their missiles astray, and Krandramas [the moon] shall bar the way of the enemy that has not started.'<sup>1</sup> Like the Madonna of the Christian Church Aditya staves off the arrows of pestilence. The Aryan warrior certainly, the primitive Greek probably, used poisoned arrows.

The language of the 91st Psalm reveals the same imagery as do the Homeric epic and the Vedic hymns.

' I will say unto the Lord, Thou art my hope, and my stronghold : my God, in him will I trust. For he shall deliver thee from the snare of the hunter : and from the noisome pestilence. He shall defend thee under his wings, and thou shalt be safe under his feathers : his faithfulness and truth shall be thy shield and buckler. Thou shalt not be afraid for any terror by night : nor for the arrow that flieth by day : For the pestilence that walketh in darkness : nor for the sickness that destroyeth in the noonday. A thousand shall fall beside thee, and ten thousand at thy right hand : but it shall not come nigh thee.'

The arrows of pestilence have sunk deep into the tissue of many languages. Practically all the Hebrew words for plague (*Maggefah*, *Negef*, *Naga*, *Makkah*) indicate a blow. Our English 'plague' is derived through the Latin *plaga* from the Greek *πληγή*, a blow : so too the German *plage*. The French *fléau*—a flail or a plague—embodies the same idea of a blow, and is derived from the Latin *flagellum* and the Greek *θλίβω*. To-day even physicians must needs call the poisons of pestilence 'toxines', as though they were arrow-poisons discharged from a bow (*τόξον* from *τυγχάνω* = I hit). The Arabians speak of being 'stung'

<sup>1</sup> *Atharvaveda*, V. xi. 10.

or 'pricked' with plague, recalling respectively the serpents and the arrows of pestilence.

Passing allusion has been made above to the plagues of Pharaoh : it remains only to be said that there is now pretty general agreement that these ten plagues represent merely the seasonal variations, to which Egypt is peculiarly liable, magnified in Jewish oral tradition. Perhaps the last plague, the death of the first-born, at the April of the exodus (*circa* 1220 B.C.) may have been a true *pestis puerorum*, falling with chief severity on those who lacked the immunity afforded by a previous epidemic. It was the incursion of Libyans and of the nations of the Greek seas into Egypt, at least as much as the Biblical plagues, that enabled the Israelitish serfs to make good their escape.

During the period of wandering in the wilderness Korah, Dathan, and Abiram revolted against the ascendancy of Moses and Aaron, and God caused them to be swallowed up with all their households by an earthquake. Some of the children of Israel murmured against their fate. Those that did so were visited with a plague, that carried off 14,700 persons. The plague was stayed by Aaron offering incense as an atonement on the altar—sacrifice still, but the sacrifice only of a sweet savour to a God dwelling in heaven. The juxtaposition, if it be not permissible to say the association, of earthquake and pestilence in this narrative is noteworthy, in view of the widespread belief in their causal relationship, in later times.

All through the Old Testament plague is regarded, as here, as a direct consequence of God's anger. In the New Testament it figures but little, and then rather as corrective than punitive. The God of the Old Testament is a God of vengeance : only in the later Prophets do we find even a foreshadowing of the God of love and forgiveness, the God of the New Testament. In portraying pestilence Art has retained this conception of God as a stern punisher of



wrongdoing, but in the personality of Christ, approached through the mediation of the Madonna and Saints, has recognized the New Testament conception of God.

The entrance into Canaan was the beginning to the Israelites of a long period of warfare with surrounding tribes. At last, in the pitched battle of Eben-ezer, the Philistines crushed the army of Israel, captured the ark of the covenant, and carried it off to Ashdod, where they placed it in the temple of their own national god, Dagon. On two successive nights the image of Dagon was mysteriously thrown down from its pedestal. 'The hand of the Lord was heavy upon them of Ashdod, and he destroyed them, and smote them with emerods, even Ashdod and the coasts thereof.' The men of Ashdod made haste to send away the ark to Gath, another Philistine city, but here, too, God 'smote the men of the city, both small and great, and they had emerods in their secret parts'. From Gath it was sent to Ekron with like result: 'for there was a deadly destruction throughout all the city; the hand of God was very heavy there. And the men that died not were smitten with the emerods: and the cry of the city went up to heaven.' After seven months of pestilence, the Philistines called for the priests and diviners, to inquire in what way they should send back the ark. These told them that, if they wished for deliverance from the plague, the ark must on no account be sent back empty, but with a trespass-offering of five golden emerods and five golden mice, 'images of your emerods, and images of your mice that mar the land.' The ark was to be sent in a new cart, drawn by two milch kine, while their calves were kept at home. If the kine took the straight way by the coast to Beth-shemesh, they would know that it was God that had smitten them, 'but if not, then we shall know that it is not his hand that smote us: it was a chance that happened to us. And the men did so: and took two milch kine, and tied them to the cart, and shut up their calves at home:

And they laid the ark of the Lord upon the cart, and the coffer with the mice of gold and the images of their emerods. And the kine took the straight way to the way of Beth-shemesh, and went along the highway, lowing as they went, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left; and the lords of the Philistines went after them unto the border of Beth-shemesh. And they of Beth-shemesh were reaping their wheat-harvest in the valley: and they lifted up their eyes, and saw the ark, and rejoiced to see it. And the cart came into the field of Joshua, a Beth-shemite, and stood there, where there was a great stone: and they clave the wood of the cart, and offered the kine a burnt-offering unto the Lord. And the Levites took down the ark of the Lord, and the coffer that was with it, wherein the jewels of gold were, and put them on the great stone: and the men of Beth-shemesh offered burnt offerings and sacrificed sacrifices the same day unto the Lord . . ., which stone remaineth unto this day in the field of Joshua, the Beth-shemite.' Fifty thousand and seventy of the people of Beth-shemesh were smitten with the plague, 'because they had looked into the ark of the Lord.'

In its essential features the narrative of this plague of Ashdod is a mere replica of the Homeric plague. The manifest cause is God's displeasure, but when it falls on Israelites, God's chosen people, as well as on Philistines, it is perplexing, for knowledge of contagion or communicability is as yet unborn. But an explanation is ready to hand—the Israelites *also* have offended God by looking into the ark. The sin-offerings are to be representations in gold of the disease, akin to the votive offerings of diseased parts dedicated in the sanctuaries of Asclepius, and representations of mice, which then and after were generally associated with pestilence—imitative magic again in its simplest form. The sacrificial stone is left as a commemorative altar for all time. Religion has now appeared to reinforce magic. The Philistine diviners do indeed hazard the thought that the plague may



have been a mere 'chance that happened to us', and so faintly foreshadow a belief in the natural causation of epidemic disease.

Have we sufficient data to establish the identity of this contagious pestilence? It broke out on the sea-coast among a race of maritime traders, and spread from the coast to other inland towns. It lasted more than seven months. It took on two forms, a severe type with early death, and a less fatal type, in which swellings (so-called emerods) developed in the secret parts, a comprehensive term which habitually included the whole area adjacent to the genitals, and therein the groins. On these data alone it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that it was true oriental plague, with a proportion of bubonic cases, a disease that throughout its recorded history has hugged this corner of the Levant.

Votive offerings for the healing of disease generally portrayed the part diseased, rather than the actual disease, the latter so often defying plastic representation. But, in the case of a simple swelling, it is natural that the disease itself should be modelled.

It is tempting to assert with confidence a direct causal connexion between the morbid swellings and the mice, for rats and mice were ill distinguished from each other until recent times. The matter is further complicated by the fact that there is considerable doubt as to the authenticity of parts, at least, of the narrative. The composition of the Books of Samuel ranged over some seven centuries, from 900-200 B.C., and the mouse story is believed to be a late interpolation, of which it is impossible to fix the date. But in the text, as it stands, the mice are designated 'mice that mar the land', and ancient literature abounds in records of appalling devastation of crops by the agency of field-mice. Aelian,<sup>1</sup> Aristotle,<sup>2</sup> Strabo,<sup>3</sup> Theophrastus, Pliny,

<sup>1</sup> xvii. 41.

<sup>2</sup> *Hist. Anim.* vi. 37. 580 B.

<sup>3</sup> *Geographica*, xiii. i. 48, and iii. 104.

and others testify to this. Loeffler<sup>1</sup> gives an account of a Thessalian corn-harvest destroyed by a horde of field-voles, a field being completely devastated in a single night. Mice were, in fact, one prominent cause of the famine-plagues<sup>2</sup> of history. Viewed in this light, it helps us to understand another Biblical pestilence, that fell on the army of Sennacherib, in 701 B.C., at Pelusium. This campaign of Sennacherib was undertaken to quell a general revolt of the western states against Assyrian supremacy and the payment of tribute to the Assyrian king. The revolt was fomented, seemingly, by Merodach-Baladan, whom Sargon had ousted from the kingship of Babylon, and who now drew Hezekiah into the revolt. He sent an embassy with gifts to Hezekiah, nominally to congratulate him on his recovery from a severe illness, which the Bible narrative terms 'a boil'. This may perhaps indicate true pustular plague, but forms of boil (e. g. Baghdad boil), quite distinct from plague, are familiar occurrences in several regions of the East. Sennacherib first crushed Merodach-Baladan, and then advanced against Hezekiah, who at once called on Tirhaquah, the Ethiopian viceroy of Egypt, for help. At the pitched battle of Altaku Sennacherib defeated Tirhaquah, and shut up Hezekiah in Jerusalem, to which he proceeded to lay siege. Meantime Tirhaquah rallied his army and again advanced to the aid of Hezekiah, so that Sennacherib was compelled to march south against him. At Pelusium, on the border of Egypt, Sennacherib's army was suddenly destroyed by a pestilence, that compelled him to withdraw the remnant at once to Assyria. 'And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the Lord went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses.'<sup>3</sup> Isaiah confirms in detail the narrative of

<sup>1</sup> *Zoologist*, September 1892.

<sup>2</sup> Strabo, *Geographica*, iii. 104.

<sup>3</sup> 2 Kings xix. 35.



the Book of Kings, and the Chaldaean chronicler, Berosus, in a fragment preserved by Josephus, states also that Sennacherib was driven back by pestilence. The prism inscriptions of Sennacherib are characteristically silent on the subject: they tell only how he shut up Hezekiah in Jerusalem, like a bird in a cage.

Pelusium has an evil reputation in the annals of pestilence. Procopius cites it as the starting-point of Justinian's plague. There, too, one of the Crusading expeditions developed plague; and again, in A.D. 1799, the army of Napoleon was infected there and carried the disease into Syria. The explanation is not far to seek. The eastern and southern coasts of the Mediterranean, and more particularly Syria, Egypt, and Libya, were the points to which the merchants of the East brought their merchandise for exchange with that of the West. From time immemorial Arab caravans and camels had traversed well-worn trade-routes from the East abutting on the Mediterranean at Tyre, Sidon, and Pelusium, and later at Alexandria. In these meeting-places of East and West, as also at Constantinople, plague would most readily, and actually did, find a footing. Possibly the eastern Delta may have been an endemic centre, but more likely, as was believed in the late Chinese plague, a distributing centre was an original source.

Byron in his lines in the *Hebrew Melodies* on the 'Destruction of Sennacherib' has caught the passionate note of fervid patriotism, on which the chosen race celebrated their deliverance from the heathen enemy by the might of their own God, and has retained the imagery and simple diction of the Bible story:

For the Angel of Death spread his wings on the blast,  
And breathed on the face of the foe as he passed:  
And the eyes of the sleepers wax'd deadly and chill,  
And their hearts but once heaved, and for ever grew still.

And the might of the Gentile, unsmote by the sword,  
Hath melted like snow in the glance of the Lord.

Herodotus<sup>1</sup> relates that the tradition of this wonderful deliverance lived on in Egypt also. His cicerone in the temple of Ptah at Memphis told him the following tale. 'The next king was a priest of Vulcan, called Sethos. This monarch despised and neglected the warrior class of the Egyptians, as though he did not need their services. Among other indignities which he offered them, he took from them the lands which they possessed under all the previous kings, consisting of twelve acres of choice land for each warrior. Afterwards, therefore, when Sennacherib, king of the Arabians and Assyrians, marched his vast army into Egypt, the warriors one and all refused to come to his aid. On this the monarch, greatly distressed, entered into the inner sanctuary, and before the image of the god bewailed the fate that impended over him. As he wept he fell asleep, and dreamed that the god came and stood at his side, bidding him be of good cheer, and go boldly forth to meet the Arabian host, which would do him no hurt, as he himself would send those who should help him. Sethos then, relying on the dream, collected such of the Egyptians as were willing to follow him, who were none of them warriors, but traders, artisans, and market people, and with these marched to Pelusium, which commands the entrance into Egypt, and there pitched his camp. As the two armies lay here opposite one another, there came in the night a multitude of field-mice, which devoured all the quivers and bow-strings of the enemy and ate the thongs by which they managed their shields. Next morning they commenced their flight, and great multitudes fell, as they had no arms with which to defend themselves. There stands to this day in the temple of Vulcan a stone statue of Sethos, with a mouse in his hand, and an inscription to this effect: "Look on me and learn to reverence the gods."'

Strabo<sup>2</sup> has a story of mice eating up the bow-strings,

<sup>1</sup> ii. 141; and Rawlinson's *Herodotus*, ed. 1880, vol. ii. 219-20.

<sup>2</sup> *Geographica*. xiii. 64.



and a variant of it appears also in Chinese annals,<sup>1</sup> so that it may be regarded as merely a figurative expression for some providential deliverance from an enemy, and in the case of Sennacherib the medium of deliverance was pestilence.

It is impossible to say whose was the statue Herodotus ascribes to Sethos, for no king Sethos is known in Egyptian history. Perhaps it was a statue of Horus, the Egyptian equivalent of Apollo, or not impossibly of Apollo himself, for we have abundant evidence of the association of the mouse with Apollo. In the pestilence of the *Iliad*,<sup>2</sup> Chryses addresses him as Mouse-God (*Σμινθεύς*). Strabo says that the statue of Apollo Smintheus in Chrysa, a town of the Troad, had a mouse beneath his foot: so also has a bronze coin now in the British Museum. De Witte<sup>3</sup> has figured coins of Alexandria, the more ancient Hamaxitus, in the Troad, in which Apollo Smintheus is represented with his bow, and a mouse on his hand. Aelian<sup>4</sup> says that an effigy of the mouse stood beside the tripod of Apollo. An ancient bas-relief, of uncertain date, illustrating the Homeric plague and the offerings of the Greeks to Apollo Smintheus, also shows a mouse on a tripod. Another shows Apollo with a mouse beneath his chin: so, too, does a coin of Tenedos. White mice were actually kept beneath the altar in the temple of Apollo Smintheus at Hamaxitus, and were fed at the public expense. Strabo<sup>5</sup> says that the worship of Apollo Smintheus extended to the whole coast of Asia Minor and to the neighbouring islands.

Many votive offerings in the form of mice have been found, at Alexandria Troas,<sup>6</sup> in Palestine,<sup>7</sup> and elsewhere, and Strabo suggests that the worship of mice originated in a desire to propitiate mice, so as to induce them not to ravage

<sup>1</sup> *Journal Asiatique*, 1st series, iii. 307.

<sup>2</sup> i. 39.

<sup>3</sup> *Revue Numismatique*, N.S. iii.

<sup>4</sup> *Nat. Anim.* xii. 5.

<sup>5</sup> *Geographica*, xiii. i. 64.

<sup>6</sup> Newton, *Travels and Discoveries in the Levant*, i. 130.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas, *Two Years in Palestine*, p. 6.

the cornfields. The propitiation of animals,<sup>1</sup> and particularly of those that infest the crops, is common in the worship of primitive men. The Philistines are said to have made images of the mice that marred their land, and sent them out of their country, so as to induce the real mice to depart also. In a later stage of worship, when a god has supplanted the animal, the god is propitiated instead of the pest itself: hence Mouse Apollo,<sup>2</sup> Locust Apollo,<sup>3</sup> Wolf Apollo,<sup>4</sup> and Zeus Averter of Flies.<sup>5</sup> Even lowlier pests are absorbed into the godhead, so that we have Apollo Erythibius<sup>6</sup> (ἐρυθίβη = mildew), and the Romans personified it and worshipped it as Robigus<sup>7</sup> (*robigo* = mildew). The Chams of Indo-China offer sacrifices to a rude pillar-idol, called Yang-tikuh (god-rat), when swarms of rats infest the fields.<sup>8</sup> Thus Apollo seems to stand in the same relation to the mouse, as Asclepius to the serpent. He not only sends pestilence, but also wards it off both from man and from crops. And viewing all the facts we may conclude with some certainty that the association of mice with famine-pestilence was well recognized, but of any knowledge at this time of the association of rats with plague there is little evidence.

Plutarch<sup>9</sup> asserts that the Persian Magi killed all their mice and rats, because they and the gods they worshipped entertained a natural antipathy to them, a feeling which, he says, they shared with the Arabians and Ethiopians. One is curious to know what may have been the real ground of this antipathy, for which Plutarch advances the current explanation. More than likely it was that experience had taught these nations the relation of these animals to famine and perhaps to pestilence as well.

<sup>1</sup> Frazer, *Golden Bough*, ed. 1900, ii. 423.

<sup>2</sup> *Iliad*, i. 39.

<sup>3</sup> Strabo, *loc. cit.*

<sup>4</sup> Aeschylus, *Theb.* 145.

<sup>5</sup> Pausanias, v. 14. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Strabo, *loc. cit.*

<sup>7</sup> Varro, *Rerum rusticarum* i. 1. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Aymonier, *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, xxiv (1891) 236.

<sup>9</sup> *Morals: Essay on Envy and Hatred.*



Nicholas Poussin (1593-1665) painted a picture, now in the Louvre, of the plague of Ashdod. An inferior replica hangs in the National Gallery, and yet another in the Academy at Lisbon. Horror is the dominant note of a composition that is full of movement. High up between the columns of a temple stands the ark of God. Beside it the body of Dagon lies prostrate on its pedestal, with head and hands lying below. A priest points out with his hand the mutilated image to a group of awe-stricken men, who from their air of authority seem to be elders of the people. A swarm of rats has invaded the town. The streets are strewn with dead and dying of each sex and of every age, and bearers carry away the corpses. Broken columns, lying here and there among the plague-stricken, heighten the sense of death and destruction. In the centre of the foreground is a group that Poussin has borrowed from Raphael. A woman with bared breasts lies dead between her two infants: one is dead, the other is approaching the dead mother's breast. The father stoops down with hand stretched out to hold it back: with his other he muffles his mouth and nose to shut out infection. To the right another man holds back an older child who is coming towards the dead woman. One man is huddled up in a dying convulsion, another lies exhausted on a broken pillar. On the steps a sick man implores assistance from one who hurries past him to avoid infection. To the left a man with pity depicted on his face regards another writhing in agony. The whole scene is set in the centre of the town in an open space surrounded by massive buildings in the classical style that Poussin acquired among the ruined monuments of Rome. None of the bodies show any distinctive signs of plague, the disease clearly indicated by the presence of swarms of rats.

One other Biblical<sup>1</sup> pestilence, the plague of David, presents to us another and more enduring image of pestilence,

<sup>1</sup> 2 Samuel xxiv; and 1 Chronicles xxi.

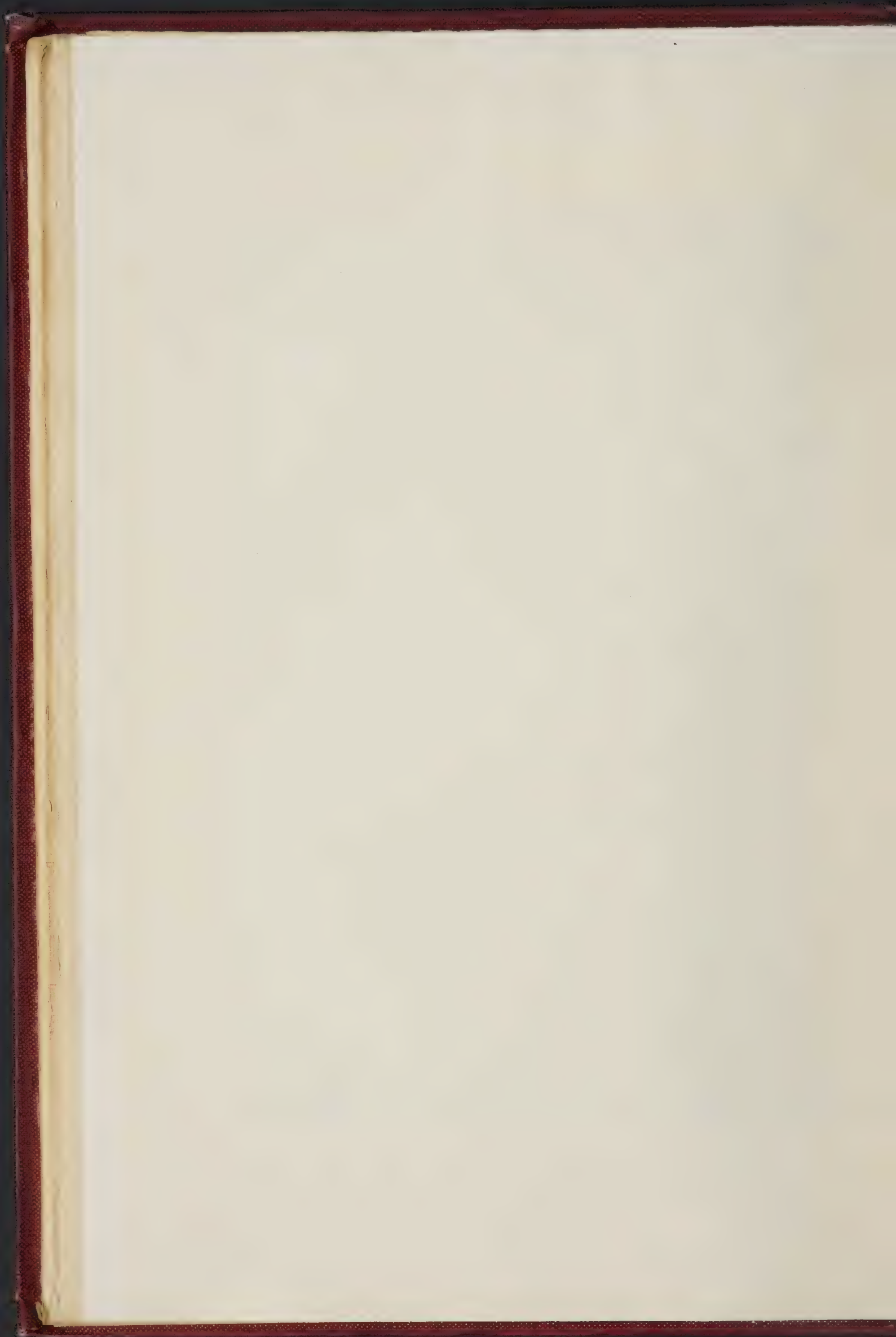




PLATE II    PLAGUE OF ASHDOD. BY N. POUSSIN

Photograph by Giraudon, Paris    (Face Page 18)





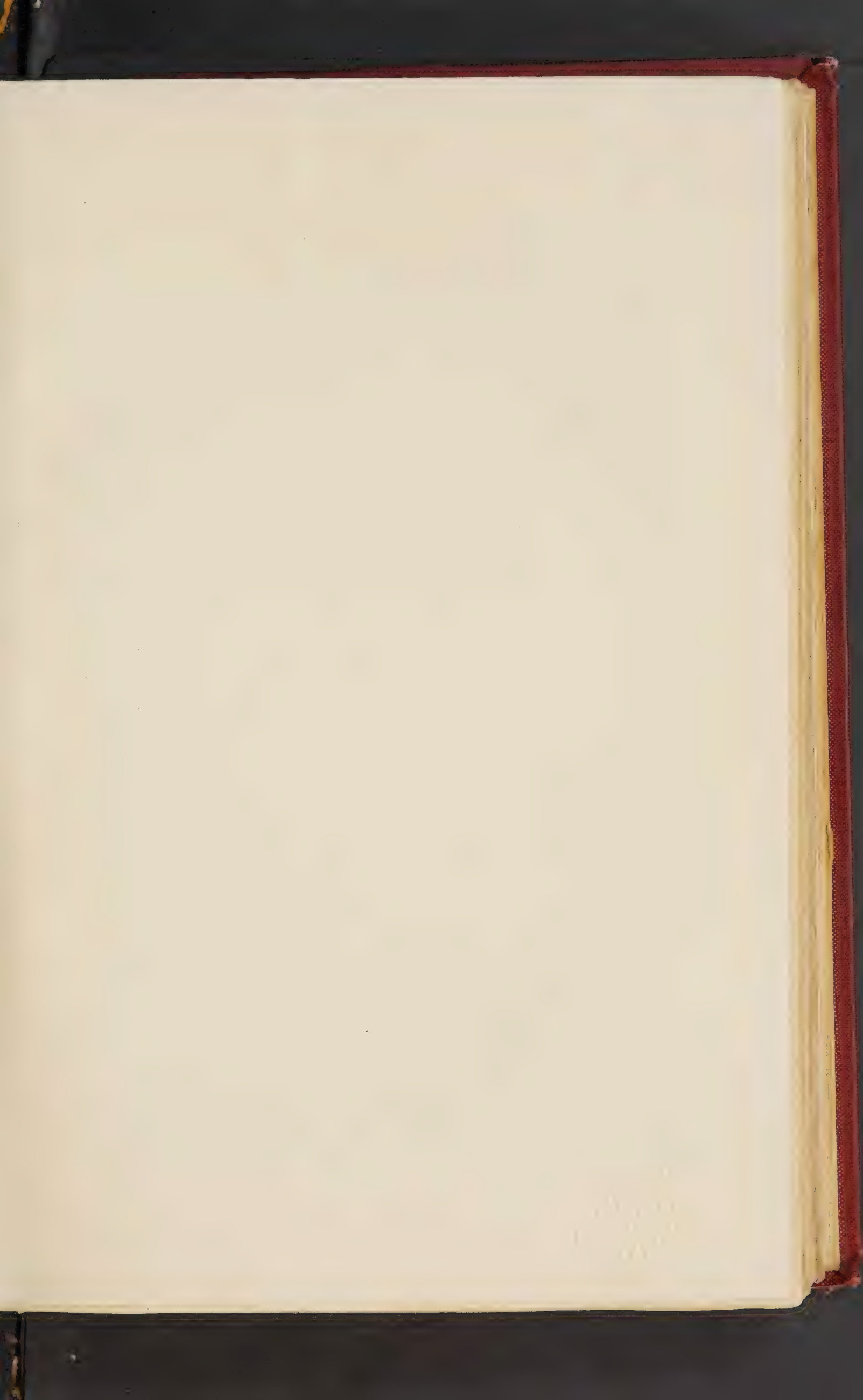






PLATE III    PLAGUE OF DAVID. BY P. MIGNARD    (Face Page 19)



and represents also a stage at which religion has superseded magic. David, in punishment for his presumption in numbering the people, is given the choice of seven years of famine, three months of fleeing before his enemies, or three days of pestilence. He chose the last, and seventy thousand of his people perished. 'And David lifted up his eyes, and saw the Angel of the Lord stand between the earth and the heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem.' 'And when the angel stretched out his hand upon Jerusalem to destroy it,' God checked him by the threshing-floor of Araunah the Jebusite. 'And the Lord commanded the angel; and he put up his sword again into the sheath thereof.' Then the prophet Gad told David to set up an altar in the threshing-floor of Araunah. So David bought it and set up an altar and offered sacrifice to God, and the plague was stayed: on the site of this altar Solomon built the Temple.

Here again pestilence figures as a signal evidence of God's displeasure. An angel is the agent by which He spreads the plague, and the drawn sword, Israel's favourite weapon, replaces the bow and arrow. The sheathing of the sword is the sign that the pestilence is ended. This imagery appears again and again in Christian literature and art, and seems to have its origin here. Angels are a beautiful fancy of all religions of the East. So vivid is the primitive conception of pestilence, that we find it personified from earliest times: now as an archer-god: now as one walking in darkness: now as an angel with drawn sword. David offers the same expiatory sacrifice and rears a commemorative altar, as was done in the plague of Ashdod.

Pierre Mignard (1610-95) has painted the plague of David. The original is lost, but an engraving by Audran is to be had at the Chalcographie of the Louvre. As with Poussin, the scene is set with a background of classical architecture, but the rendering of the figures shows little



trace of classical feeling. The central theme is the idea of devotion in the presence of suffering. An angel in the sky is pouring forth sulphurous fumes from two vessels, as brimstone and fire were rained down upon Sodom and Gomorrah. On the peristyle of a temple King David offers sacrifices of atonement to stay the plague, while the people prostrate themselves in attitudes of supplication around the steps of the temple. In the background is a cascade of water falling into a basin, beside which one man lies dying, while others endeavour to slake their thirst. Two men hasten forward to drive them from the basin, before they pollute its water. This incident is derived with some licence of interpretation from the narrative of Thucydides. In the centre of the picture, reminiscent of Raphael, a young woman lies dying in her husband's arms, her dead child still stretched across her knees. In the foreground is a charcoal brazier giving off purifying fumes. Near it a doctor, who has just incised a bubo in a woman's armpit, falls back in a state of collapse, dropping his bistoury and bowl, while his assistant, who is still holding the woman's arm away from her side, grasps at his master to prevent him falling. A bystander makes off in horrified dismay. Compassion and cowardice are here ranged side by side. To the right two men are distributing food and medicine to the sick. An attendant kneels to offer a stricken man a cup of water, while a torch-bearer follows with a lighted torch to disinfect the air. Close beside them lies a dog dead. To the left one young woman is giving some remedy in a spoon to another stretched on the ground, while behind them stand a woman and child, both in tears. Detached incidents fill in the picture. A woman grasps a delirious man as he escapes from his house. A man carries off a girl in his arms. A woman tears her hair over the dead body of her child. A woman draws up food to her window with basket and cord.

With the exception of the plague of Ashdod, it is difficult

to hazard a guess at the nature of these Biblical plagues. All through the Old Testament, sword, famine, and pestilence are habitually linked together. As plague has followed the flag of commerce, so famine and typhus have followed the flag of war. During the Thirty Years' War the whole of Central Europe was devastated by famine and typhus. They were rampant in the wake of Napoleon's armies, and thousands perished of typhus during the retreat from Moscow. In the Crimea typhus decimated the ill-fed army of the French, and only to-day, as it were, have we learnt that the body-louse stands as the connecting link between famine and typhus. The eighteenth century in Ireland, even when war was absent, was an almost unbroken record of famine and typhus, and Ireland was quit of epidemic typhus only when she had so widened her area of supplies as to ensure immunity from famine. For her deliverance from typhus Ireland is beholden to her potatoes, not to her physicians. In the light then of the evidence of modern history, typhus may well have figured prominently in the list of Biblical plagues. Still there are not wanting many instances in which true plague has followed hard on the heels of famine ; and in India cholera and dysentery only too often appear, to complete the work that famine has but half done.



## CHAPTER II

THE conception of pestilence as a punishment for sin is as prominent in Greek as in Hebrew literature. We have seen it in the Homeric story, and we see it again, where we should less expect it, in Sophocles. Pestilence still centres round the personality of Apollo, but whereas in Homer Apollo stays the plague, in Sophocles he is appealed to only for knowledge, whereby to stay it. Homer endows him with special power, Sophocles only with special knowledge. In Homer he is the god of the bright light (*φοῖβος*), that dispels the darkness of pestilence: in Sophocles his is the light that illumines the dark places of mind.

The *Oedipus Tyrannus* seems to have been first publicly performed between 429-420 B. C., possibly therefore before the plague of Athens had finally died out. Sophocles is certainly not describing the plague of Athens in the guise of a Theban plague, but it must needs have coloured his thoughts as well as those of his audience. His description of the pestilence blighting the crops, and causing murrain among cattle and disease and death among men, suggests one of the famine plagues common in ancient history. Hesiod<sup>1</sup> was not unaware of them (*λιμὸν ὁμοῦ καὶ λοιμόν*). Sophocles is the first writer to attempt even in outline a description of pestilence, and in doing so he has drawn the picture of pestilence sent by the gods for the punishment of sin. The way of atonement is sought for at Delphi, and pending this knowledge supplication is made to Athena, Artemis, and Apollo, the deities who control pestilence and have the plague-stricken city in their special

<sup>1</sup> *Works*, 243.

keeping. Here is the invocation to Apollo, the Delian Healer :

Shower from the golden string  
Thine arrows, Lycian King.  
O Phoebe, let thy fiery lances fly  
Resistless, as they rove  
Through Xanthus' mountain-grove !  
O Theban Bacchus of the lustrous eye,  
With torch and trooping Maenads and bright crown,  
Blaze on the god whom all in Heaven disown.<sup>1</sup>

Set in this archaic atmosphere the *Oedipus Tyrannus* reads strange beside the realistic record of Thucydides, published only a few years later. But Sophocles has given only in outline what Thucydides has given in arresting detail.

To the historian, the physician, and the man of letters, the account given by Thucydides of the plague of Athens, in the course of the Peloponnesian War, must stand for all time as one of the most remarkable documents in the whole annals of pestilence. In view of the much greater strength of the Lacedaemonian land-force, it was the unwavering policy of Pericles to keep the Athenians within their walls, allowing the Lacedaemonians to exhaust themselves in devastating Attic territory, while retaliating on the coasts of Peloponnesus by the Athenian fleet. Each year, at the approach of the Lacedaemonian army, the inhabitants of Attica flocked within the walls of Athens, bringing with them all their movable property, after sending their sheep and cattle to Euboea and the neighbouring islands, so that the added horror of a great epizootic was averted. The greater number encamped in the vacant spaces of the city and Piraeus, and in and around the numerous temples. Some housed their families in the towers and recesses of the city walls, or in sheds, cabins, tents, or even tubs, disposed throughout the

<sup>1</sup> Tr. L. Campbell.



course of the long walls. This was the overcrowded state of beleaguered Athens, when pestilence broke out in the second year of the Peloponnesian War (430 B. C.), putting the policy of Pericles to a crucial test.

After ravaging the plain, the Peloponnesians devastated the coastlands of Attica, first on the south coast, and then on the north. Pericles forthwith equipped an Athenian naval squadron, and launched his counterstroke against the Peloponnese. This fleet carried 4,000 hoplites and 300 cavalry, who ravaged the district round Epidaurus, and other towns on the adjacent coast. It seems, however, despite the rumour to the contrary, which Thucydides faithfully records, that neither the pestilence nor the operations of this expeditionary force actually accelerated the departure of the Lacedaemonians, for they stayed 40 days, which was longer than any other stay. Pestilence broke out in this expeditionary force, and is doubtless the reason that it returned without accomplishing more. Plutarch indeed says that the Athenians would have captured Epidaurus, but for this outbreak of sickness.

The Athenians also sent another fleet this same summer against Potidaea in Thrace, which was already undergoing a siege at the hands of an Athenian army. Pestilence worked fearful havoc in this supplementary force and spread from it to the troops who were already there, involving a mortality of 1,050 out of a total of 4,000 hoplites, so that the expedition was compelled to return and leave the siege to the troops that were there before them.

In their despair the Athenians vented their angry feelings on Pericles, just as persons in a delirium, says Plutarch,<sup>1</sup> turn on their physician or their father. They urged that the pestilence was due to cooping up in the city in stifling huts a rural population accustomed to an open-air existence, so that they conveyed infection to one another. But

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Pericles.*

popular resentment subsided as quickly as it arose. In a noble speech, which Thucydides reproduces at length, Pericles weaned them to a better mind. His own domestic sufferings may have stirred their sympathy. He lost of the pestilence his only two legitimate sons, Xanthippus and Paralus, his sister, and many relatives and friends. The death of his favourite son, Paralus, left him with no legitimate heir to maintain the family and the hereditary sacred rites. 'That blow', says Plutarch,<sup>1</sup> 'crushed him to earth. He struggled indeed to preserve his wonted impassiveness and to maintain his serene composure. But, as he laid a wreath upon the body and looked upon his dead, the anguish of it all overwhelmed him, and he burst out wailing and sobbing bitterly—a thing which in all his life he had never before done.' The spectacle of this proud, reserved man, this man who had stood firm as a rock amid the rising tide of popular resentment, humbled before God, humiliated before man, as the iron seared his innermost soul, is one of the most moving pictures in all history and literature.

My God has bowed me down to what I am,  
My solitude and grief have brought me low.

'Shortly after this, it appears, the pestilence laid hold on Pericles. The attack was not, as in other cases, sharp and severe. It took the form of an ailment, slight but protracted through a variety of phases, which slowly wasted his strength and undermined the vigour of his mind.' But if we may judge by the accounts of his death-bed given by Plutarch himself, and by Theophrastus in his *Ethics*, his mind was free from any taint of insanity.

The first outbreak of pestilence lasted for two years, from the spring of 430 B. C. to that of 428 B. C., then came a partial, but not complete, abatement for one and a half years, followed by another outbreak in 427 B. C. which lasted a year. 'To the power of Athens', says Thucydides,

<sup>1</sup> Tr. W. R. Frazer.



'certainly nothing was more ruinous. Not less than 4,400 Athenian hoplites, who were on the roll, died, and also 300 horsemen, and an incalculable number of the common people', estimated by Diodorus Siculus<sup>1</sup> at 10,000 freemen and slaves. Bury<sup>2</sup> puts the total number of Athenian burghers (of both sexes and all ages) at the commencement of the Peloponnesian War at 100,000, and this total was reduced by the pestilence to some 80,000 or less. The metic class and the slaves he estimates roundly at 30,000 and 100,000 respectively, but beyond the unreliable statement of Diodorus Siculus, we have no index of their reduction. In accepting the verdict of Thucydides on the disastrous effects of the pestilence on the power of Athens, we must not forget that there were other influences at work, conspiring to this same result, the consequences of which Pericles had pointed out clearly in his speech before the war. Had it not been for these, Athens would beyond doubt have rallied quickly from the blow, as we shall see that other cities have habitually done in like case with hers.

The circumstances under which the epidemic broke out a second time in Athens cannot have differed greatly from those prevailing at its first onset, for though it was winter and the Lacedaemonian army was not in the field, the surrounding country had been devastated, and most of the peasantry must still have been cooped up, in a state of overcrowding, within the walls. As the pestilence lingered on in Athens, superstition laid fast hold on the populace, under the stress of their protracted sufferings. On the advice of the oracle, they decided to purify the island of Delos, which formerly had been dedicated to Apollo, but latterly had been used as a burial-ground. All the dead were transferred to a neighbouring island Rhene, and a law was passed forbidding henceforth the burial of a corpse or the birth of a child in Delos. The neglected

<sup>1</sup> xii. 58.

<sup>2</sup> *History of Greece*.

panegyric festival of Apollo was also revived in the island. No stone was left unturned to appease the god, who, the Athenians now were persuaded, had sent them the distemper.

Earthquakes and inundations lasted, as did the pestilence, throughout the summer of 426 B. C. Diodorus Siculus seems to suggest that the earthquakes were sent by Apollo, who had been duly propitiated, to divert the Lacedaemonians from the invasion of Attica. Actually they did effect this, for Agis, King of Sparta, though already arrived at the isthmus, accepted the omen and led his army back. Neither Thucydides nor Diodorus Siculus asserts any direct causal relation between the earthquakes and the pestilence—a belief, which if now vaguely foreshadowed, took definite form only at a later date.

The following is the full narrative<sup>1</sup> of the pestilence, as given by Thucydides :

‘ As soon as summer returned, the Peloponnesian army, comprising as before two-thirds of the force of each confederate state, under the command of the Lacedaemonian king Archidamus, the son of Zeuxidamus, invaded Attica, where they established themselves and ravaged the country. They had not been there many days when the plague broke out at Athens for the first time. *It* is said to have previously smitten many places, particularly Lemnos, but there is no record of *so great* a pestilence occurring elsewhere, or of *such* a destruction of human life. For a while physicians, in ignorance of the nature of the disease, sought to apply remedies ; but it was in vain, and they themselves were among the first victims, because they oftenest came into contact with it. No human art was of any avail, and as to supplications in temples, enquiries of oracles, and the like, they were utterly useless, and at last men were overpowered by the calamity and gave them all up. The disease is said to have begun south of Egypt in Ethiopia :

<sup>1</sup> Jowett's *Thucydides*. We have ventured to introduce one or two slight modifications into Professor Jowett's translation, indicating them by italics. In medicine it makes a world of difference, whether a disease is the *same* or *similar* : its *course* too, is something quite distinct from its character.



thence it descended into Egypt and Libya, and after spreading over the greater part of the Persian empire, suddenly fell upon Athens. It first attacked the inhabitants of the Piraeus, and it was supposed that the Peloponnesians had poisoned the cisterns, no conduits having as yet been made there. It afterwards reached the upper city, and then the mortality became far greater. As to its probable origin or the causes which might or could have produced such a disturbance of nature, every man, whether a physician or not, will give his own opinion. But I shall describe its actual *character*, and the symptoms by which any one who knows them beforehand may recognize the disorder, should it ever reappear. For I was myself attacked, and witnessed the sufferings of others.

The season was admitted to have been remarkably free from ordinary sickness; and if anybody was already ill of any other disease, it was absorbed in this. Many who were in perfect health, all in a moment, and without any apparent reason, were seized with violent heats in the head and with redness and inflammation of the eyes. Internally the throat and the tongue were quickly suffused with blood, and the breath became unnatural and fetid. There followed sneezing and hoarseness; in a short time the disorder, accompanied by a violent cough, reached the chest; then fastening lower down, it would move the stomach and bring on all the vomits of bile to which physicians have ever given names; and they were very distressing. An ineffectual retching producing violent *straining* attacked most of the sufferers; some as soon as the previous symptoms had abated, others not until long afterwards. The body externally was not so very hot to the touch, nor yet pale: it was of a livid colour inclining to red, and breaking out in pustules and ulcers. But the internal fever was intense: the sufferers could not bear to have on them even the finest linen garment. They insisted on being naked, and there was nothing which they longed for more eagerly than to throw themselves into cold water. And many of those who had no one to look after them actually plunged into the cisterns, for they were tormented by unceasing thirst, which was not in the least assuaged whether they drank little or much. They could not sleep: a restlessness which was intolerable never left them. While the disease was at its height the body, instead of wasting away, held out amid these sufferings in a marvellous manner, and either they died on the seventh or ninth day, not of weakness, for their strength

was not exhausted, but of internal fever, which was the end of most ; or, if they survived, then the disease descended into the bowels and there produced violent ulceration ; severe diarrhoea at the same time set in, and at a later stage caused exhaustion, which finally with few exceptions carried them off. For the disorder which had originally settled in the head passed gradually through the whole body, and, if a person got over the worst, would often seize the extremities and leave its mark, attacking the privy parts and the fingers and the toes ; and some escaped with the loss of these, some with the loss of their eyes. Some again had no sooner recovered than they were seized with a forgetfulness of all things and knew neither themselves nor their friends.

The malady took a form *beyond description*, and the fury with which it fastened upon each sufferer was too much for human nature to endure. There was one circumstance in particular which distinguished it from ordinary diseases. The birds and animals which feed on human flesh, although so many bodies were lying unburied, either never came near them, or died if they touched them. This was proved by a remarkable disappearance of the birds of prey, who were not to be seen either about the bodies or anywhere else : while in the case of the dogs the fact was even more obvious, because they live with man.

Such was the general nature of the disease : I omit many strange peculiarities which characterized individual cases. None of the ordinary sicknesses attacked any one while it lasted, or if they did, they ended in the plague. Some of the sufferers died from want of care, others equally who were receiving the greatest attention. No single remedy could be deemed a specific : for that which did good to one did harm to another. No constitution was of itself strong enough to resist or weak enough to escape the attacks : the disease carried off all alike and defied every mode of treatment. Most appalling was the despondency which seized upon any one who felt himself sickening : for he instantly abandoned his mind to despair and, instead of holding out, absolutely threw away his chance of life. Appalling too was the rapidity with which men caught the infection : dying like sheep if they attended on one another : and this was the principal cause of mortality. When they were afraid to visit one another, the sufferers died in their solitude, so that many houses were empty because there had been no one left to take care of the sick ; or if they ventured they perished, especially those who



aspired to heroism. For they went to see their friends without thought of themselves and were ashamed to leave them, even at a time when the very relations of the dying were at last growing weary and ceased to make lamentations, overwhelmed by the vastness of the calamity. But whatever instances there may have been of such devotion, more often the sick and the dying were tended by the pitying care of those who had recovered, because they knew the course of the disease and were themselves free from apprehension. For no one was ever attacked a second time, or with a fatal result. All men congratulated them, and they themselves, in the excess of their joy at the moment, had an innocent fancy that they could not die of any other sickness.

The crowding of the people out of the country into the city aggravated the misery ; and the newly-arrived suffered most. For, having no houses of their own, but inhabiting in the height of summer stifling huts, the mortality among them was dreadful, and they perished in wild disorder. The dead lay as they had died, one upon another, while others hardly alive wallowed in the streets and crawled about every fountain craving for water. The temples in which they lodged were full of the corpses of those who died in them : for the violence of the calamity was such that men, not knowing where to turn, grew reckless of all law, human and divine. The customs which had hitherto been observed at funerals were universally violated, and they buried their dead each one as best he could. Many, having no proper appliances, because the deaths in their household had been so frequent, made no scruple of using the burial-place of others. When one man had raised a funeral pile, others would come, and throwing on their dead first, set fire to it ; or when some other corpse was already burning, before they could be stopped would throw their own dead upon it and depart.

There were other and worse forms of lawlessness which the plague introduced at Athens. Men who had hitherto concealed their indulgence in pleasure now grew bolder. For seeing the sudden change—how the rich died in a moment, and those who had nothing immediately inherited their property—they reflected that life and riches were alike transitory, and they resolved to enjoy themselves while they could, and to think only of pleasure. Who would be willing to sacrifice himself to the law of honour when he knew not whether he would ever live to be held in honour ?

The pleasure of the moment and any sort of thing which conduced to it took the place both of honour and of expediency. No fear of God or law of man deterred a criminal. Those, who saw all perishing alike, thought that the worship or neglect of the Gods made no difference. For offences against human law no punishment was to be feared: no one would live long enough to be called to account. Already a far heavier sentence had been passed and was hanging over a man's head: before that fell, why should he not take a little pleasure?

Such was the grievous calamity which now afflicted the Athenians: within the walls their people were dying, and without, their country was being ravaged. In their troubles they naturally called to mind a verse which the elder men among them declared to have been current long ago:

A Dorian war will come and a plague with it.

There was a dispute about the precise expression: some saying that *limos*, a famine, and not *loimos*, a plague, was the original word. Nevertheless, as might have been expected, for men's memories reflected their sufferings, the argument in favour of *loimos* prevailed at the time. But if ever in future years another Dorian war arises which happens to be accompanied by a famine, they will probably repeat the verse in the other form. The answer of the oracle to the Lacedaemonians when the God was asked "whether they should go to war or not", and he replied "that if they fought with all their might, they would conquer, and that he himself would take their part", was not forgotten by those who had heard of it, and they quite imagined that they were witnessing the fulfilment of his words. The disease certainly did set in immediately after the invasion of the Peloponnesians, and did not spread to the Peloponnesus in any degree worth speaking of, while Athens felt its ravages most severely, and next to Athens the places which were most populous. Such was the history of the plague.'

A careful study, line upon line and word by word, of the description which Thucydides has given of the clinical features of the Athenian pestilence, viewing it on the one hand in the light of the medical knowledge of the time, and on the other in the light of the revelations of modern pathology, can hardly fail to bring home to an unbiased



judgement the conviction that we have to do with typhus fever. It is true that it bears a close resemblance to Oriental plague, but whereas the objections to this diagnosis seem to us to be insuperable, we shall hope to show that those which hitherto have appeared obstacles to the diagnosis of typhus fever, are either artificial or based upon an incorrect interpretation of the text. The confusion of typhus fever and Oriental plague prevailed down to comparatively modern times even among medical writers; not only is there a striking resemblance in the clinical picture of the two diseases, but they have been constantly commingled in one and the same epidemic. This is no matter for surprise, when we remember that the flea is the chief agent in the propagation of one disease, and the body-louse of the other.

There is scarcely a single writer of the sixteenth, seventeenth, or eighteenth centuries on the subject of fevers, who has not commented on the concurrence of malignant fevers with epidemics of Oriental plague. It is true that they do not all identify the malignant fevers as typhus, simply because typhus, though distinguished as a morbid entity by Fracastorius as early as 1546, did not become generally recognized throughout Europe until the eighteenth century, and even then its identity was obscured under a multiplicity of synonyms. Ambroise Paré, in 1568, described a pestilential fever as prevailing in France along with true plague, in which the skin was marked with spots, like the bites of fleas or bugs. Vilalba says that on several occasions during the sixteenth century a spotted fever called *Tabardiglio*, which is now known to have been typhus, was rife in Spain at the same time as plague, and was much confused with it. According to Lotz a malignant spotted fever was present in London in 1624, which turned to plague in 1625, and back again to spotted fever in 1626. Similarly Sydenham states that the Great Plague of London was preceded and followed by a pestilent fever, which from his description was clearly

typhus, and he remarks that it differed from the plague only in the milder character of its symptoms. According to Diemerbroeck spotted fever (typhus) preceded plague in Holland in 1636, and its malignity increased progressively, until finally it became converted into true plague. The same is true of the plague of Marseilles in 1720, of the plague of Aleppo in 1760, and of the plague of Moscow in 1771. Hancock, in 1821, asserted that nearly all the most remarkable plagues of the last two centuries had been preceded by typhus. So much for the confusion of these two diseases, due to their concurrence.

Murchison, whose treatise on typhus stands out as a monument of acute and accurate observation, traces out in detail the resemblance of the two diseases. It is no matter only of a general clinical resemblance, such as is common to most acute infectious fevers, though that is striking enough, but beyond this there is a remarkable similarity in particular symptoms, in clinical course, and in complications. There is a tendency to regard buboes as a distinctive feature of plague, but these are found in a small moiety of cases of typhus fever. On the other side of the picture, the petechial eruptions of typhus, its most distinctive feature, are common enough in plague.

It is tempting to shirk the difficulty of a differential diagnosis by assuming that in Athens, as so often elsewhere, there was a simultaneous outbreak of typhus and plague, but the whole evidence points strongly to the presence of typhus, and typhus only. We will endeavour to present the evidence fairly and simply, so that every reader may form his own conclusion, by reference to the appended narrative of Thucydides.

Starting in Ethiopia rumour had it that the disease spread northwards to Egypt and Libya, and thence over the greater part of the Persian Empire, which at that time included almost all of Western Asia, then suddenly it swooped



down upon Athens. The same disease was said to have previously attacked Lemnos and many other places, but with much less severity. With Lemnos Thucydides will have had close acquaintance, for it lay in the direct route to Thrace, where he owned property. He is careful to say that he gives this information as well as that of its starting-point and lines of extension only on hearsay evidence. If it were really part of one vast pandemic, it is surprising that he should have no more certain knowledge of its incidence. True, pestilence was raging this self-same year in Rome, but it must not be assumed that it was necessarily of the same character as that at Athens. All through the fifth century Rome was seldom without pestilence, and Livy and Dionysius of Halicarnassus record a succession of epidemics, some of several years' duration, following hard one upon another. If the origin in Ethiopia and the subsequent lines of advance are to be accepted, this would certainly constitute a weighty argument in favour of Oriental plague. Of late years an endemic focus of plague has been located in Central Africa, and in its spread the disease was following established routes of commerce, as has habitually been the case. Pandemicity too is an inherent tendency of plague. Typhus has followed for the most part the march of armies, and in the wake of famine, and has shown but little tendency to adhere to the beaten routes of commerce. Typhus has in some instances extended at one and the same time over a wide region, but for the most part it has been over contiguous tracts of land. Thus Hildebrand recorded an epidemic spreading to the whole of Germany, Galicia, Hungary and the Austrian crown-lands.

Thucydides has laid it down that the plague of Athens was an unknown disease. Now there is a good deal of evidence to suggest that bubonic plague was recognized, in its sporadic form, as a clinical entity at the time of Thucydides. The language of a passage in the 2nd Book of the Epidemics,

a treatise of the Hippocratic school, seems hardly susceptible of any other interpretation: *οἱ ἐπὶ βουβῶσι πυρετοὶ κακόν, πλὴν τῶν ἐφημέρων, καὶ οἱ ἐπὶ πυρετοῖσι βουβῶνες κακίονες* ('fever supervening on buboes is a bad sign, except they be ephemeral: but buboes supervening on fever still worse'). The allusions also to buboes in Aristophanes are so numerous as almost to preclude any other conclusion: and it cannot be argued that these were an aftermath of the epidemic, for Thucydides<sup>1</sup> implicitly asserts the complete disappearance of the disease.

The outbreak of the pestilence first in the Piraeus suggests importation by sea. Sea-carriage is far more characteristic of plague than of typhus, though typhus has been imported often enough from Ireland into England, and was also brought back to England by the troops from Corunna, and to France by the French troops from the Crimea. On the other hand, it was in Piraeus chiefly that the displaced peasantry were crowded together promiscuously in small stifling habitations, affording just those conditions in which typhus has habitually arisen and become epidemic.

Among those epidemic diseases, that in past times have devastated beleaguered cities, typhus unquestionably holds pride of place. Granada in 1489, Metz in 1552, Montpellier in 1623, Reading in 1643, Genoa in 1799, Saragossa in 1808, Dantzic and Wilna in 1813, and Torgau in 1814 all tell the same tale. With our lately acquired knowledge of the transmission of typhus fever by the agency of body-lice, it is easy to understand the prevalence of the disease in epidemic virulence among a beleaguered and overcrowded garrison. Murchison, whose knowledge and experience of typhus were unequalled, unhesitatingly identified the plague of Athens as typhus, both because of this special circumstance of its occurrence and because of the clinical picture as a whole.

<sup>1</sup> ii. 48 end.



The passing remarks of Thucydides on the causation of the pestilence show him not only superior to the superstitious credulity of some of his fellow countrymen, but far in advance of the most enlightened medical opinion of his day. There were still some in Athens, who put their faith in supplications in temples and inquiries of oracles : but these measures were now weighed in the balance and found wanting. The stern probation of the Persian wars had taught the lesson, that victory was the reward of the strong, not the recompense of the devout ; and with this knowledge perished the whole fabric of Greek polytheism. So now most of the populace ascribed the pestilence to natural causation : the Lacedaemonians surely had poisoned the wells. From this day onwards, right down to modern times, this phantom of poison dogs the footsteps of pestilence.

Thucydides leaves no doubt whatever as to his own views : he has done for good and all with supernatural causation, though he confesses his inability to identify the precise cause, leaving that for others to speculate about. He states and accepts without reserve contagion from man to man. In this his great contemporary, Hippocrates, lags far behind him. The mind of the Father of Medicine was still in bondage to the early Greek physicists. Conceiving disease to be caused in man by bodily disturbance, referable either to the character of the air inspired or of the food and drink ingested, it was inevitable that, in the causation of epidemic disease, Hippocrates should assign chief importance to changes in the atmosphere, to which all alike would be equally exposed. He does indeed recognize the possibility of its contamination with alien putrid effluvia, but for all that it is the mere physical changes in its constitution, which in his view are of paramount importance. Of contagion from man to man he had not the vaguest conception, and to him, as well as to Galen, and even to our own Sydenham, the

sole criterion of epidemicity was the incidence of disease on a large number of persons at the same time.

To the student of the history of medicine it will be no matter for surprise that Thucydides should have seen with undimmed vision, what Hippocrates saw as yet only through a glass darkly. Medicine in every age has been the bond-servant of plausible preconceptions, and it is humiliating to professional self-complacency to scan the long array of lay writers from Thucydides onwards, who accepted contagion as a proven fact, before the scales fell from the eyes of obscurantist Science. Out of many we may enumerate Aristotle, Lucretius, Diodorus Siculus, Vergil, Ovid, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Livy, Seneca, Silius Italicus, the elder Pliny, and Plutarch: while not till Aretaeus of Cappadocia, in the second century after Christ, do we meet clear and unequivocal acceptance in any medical author. Science, untempered by letters, is apt to induce a mental myopia, and we men of medicine would do well to reflect on the story of Archimedes, who, while drawing mathematical figures in the sand, overlooked to the cost of his life the fact, that the city had fallen into the hands of the enemy.

Though Thucydides was the first of extant writers to enunciate clearly the doctrine of contagion, there is reason to think that Oriental medicine had already grasped the idea. The Levitical ordinances seem to recognize it in the case of leprosy. It is true that these had not reached their final recension till after the time of Thucydides, but at the same time they represent a body of much older tradition.

Thucydides is careful to state that the season was not a sickly one, for Hippocrates himself attributed pestilence to heat and south winds distempering the atmosphere, and following the example of Acron and Empedocles of Agrigentum, essayed to alter the constitution of the atmosphere, in a season of pestilence, by kindling large fires. Acron aimed only at reducing its humidity, but Hippocrates may



have sought to destroy by fumigation putrid effluvia, engendered by the heat in the air. His example was scrupulously followed in the Plague of London in 1666, and in that of Marseilles in 1720. A comparison of Thucydides with Diodorus Siculus redounds but little to the credit of the latter. Diodorus submits three distinct agencies as producing the plague of Athens by their concerted action. First, that so much rain had fallen in the preceding winter, that the soil had become saturated and waterlogged: following upon this an unusually hot summer led to the exhalation from the soil of putrid effluvia, that contaminated the air. In fact pestilence was a product of the marsh miasma. Empedocles of Agrigentum was reputed to have delivered Selinus from a pestilence, in the fifth century B. C., by draining its marshes, and an extant coin commemorates the event: and Hippocrates clearly recognized the association of periodic (i. e. malarial) fevers with marshes.

Secondly, he cites lack of good food as a contributory cause, for the rain had also damaged the grain. This was not an unreasonable proposition, for the prevalence of the ergot fungus in rye grain after a wet season has given rise to many and widespread epidemics of ergotism.

Thirdly, the Etesian winds did not blow, so that the air became superheated, inflaming men's bodies with all sorts of burning distempers. It is enough for Diodorus that Hippocrates, Lucretius, and others had postulated these causes of pestilence, to secure for them acceptance in the sober record of his history. Thucydides declines even to discuss such vague hypotheses, and chooses for himself the better part of describing the actual symptoms of the disease, as he had experienced them in his own person, and witnessed them in the sufferings of others, so that any one familiar with them might be able to recognize the disorder at once, in the event of its reappearance.

To Thucydides then is due the credit not only of the first

detailed description of an actual visitation of pestilence, but of a description that breathes in every line the true spirit of history, the recording of past events as a medium for the surer forecasting of the future—the spirit that animates him in all his historical writing to give ‘a true picture of the events which have happened, and of the like events which may be expected to happen hereafter in the order of human things’—the whole duty of the historian, which not even Herodotus had recognized to the full before him. So anxious is he that his readers shall see things as he saw them, and learn the same lessons from them as he has learnt, that he is willing on occasion to manipulate his narrative, as when he brings forward the great Funeral Speech of Pericles into immediate juxtaposition to the narrative of the pestilence, assuredly so as to heighten the dramatic effect. So vivid and so forcible is his picture of the plague, that it is difficult to believe that some ten years had elapsed before he set pen to paper, and some thirty or more before the whole attained its present form. It is no matter for surprise that Lucretius, Procopius, Boccaccio, and Froissart should have paid the homage of conscious imitation to this virile narrative. (See Appendix.)<sup>1</sup>

Thucydides was the first to draw a picture of the demoralization of society in the presence of pestilence—a theme that became a commonplace with later historians of plague. The futility of the physicians, the merciless march of the pestilence, the sufferings of the sick, the neglect of the dead, the pollution of temples, the sacrilegious funeral rites, these scenes and the like throng the kaleidoscope of human misery. The sacred ties of kinship yielded under the cruel emotion of fear. Lawlessness prevailed

<sup>1</sup> The discussion of clinical details has been relegated to an Appendix, as they are rather of medical than of literary or artistic interest. They are, nevertheless, essential to a full appreciation of the merits of the description that Thucydides gives of the pestilence.



everywhere, for men seeing the uncertainty of life and riches resolved to enjoy themselves, while they could. Those who saw all perishing alike thought that worship or neglect of the gods made no difference.

It is difficult to determine what traces of the pestilence are to be found in contemporary Greek art and architecture. By some the statue of Health Athena, set up by the Athenians just outside the eastern portico of the Propylaea, is believed to have commemorated the passing of the plague of Athens. Her cult was much older than this, and perhaps derives from some primitive conception of an Earth Mother, the great protectress of all her children, as in Christian hagiology the Madonna of Health shelters them from plague and pestilence.

Pausanias<sup>1</sup> regards the romantic temple of Apollo at Bassae as a memorial of the deliverance of Phigalia from an offset of this plague of 430 B.C. He seems to infer this from the dedication of the temple to Apollo, under his surname the Helper (*Ἐπικούριος*). On the other hand, we know from Thucydides<sup>2</sup> that the plague scarcely touched Peloponnesus. It is unlikely also that an Athenian architect, Ictinus, who as Pausanias says built it, would have worked for the Peloponnesians during the war with Athens.

The same doubt attaches to the attribution of the temple of Apollo the Helper at Elis, and that of Pan the Deliverer in Troezen, and the tradition appears in each case to be referable to the surname of the god, coupled with the dates at which they were erected.

Pausanias<sup>3</sup> says that a statue of Apollo, Averter of Evil (*Ἀλεξίκακος*), by Calamis, was erected in Athens as a memorial of deliverance from the plague, but this cannot be the case, as Calamis was dead before the plague commenced.

Such dedications were, however, common enough. When

<sup>1</sup> viii. 41. 7.

<sup>2</sup> ii. 54.

<sup>3</sup> i. 3. 3.

Epimenides freed Athens from pestilence he cleansed the city and set up a shrine to the Eumenides, and the people of Tanagra<sup>1</sup> similarly showed their gratitude to Hermes the Ram-bearer (*Κριοφόρος*) by entrusting to Calamis the erection of a statue in his honour.

Poussin painted a 'Plague of Athens', a much perished picture now in the gallery of Sir Frederick Cook at Richmond. It is a dull wooden composition, and compares most unfavourably with his 'Plague of Ashdod', in spite of the close similarity of incident and episode that it depicts.

<sup>1</sup> Pausanias, ix. 22. 1.



### CHAPTER III

UNLIKE Greece, young Rome was subject to repeated pestilence: plagues punctuate the pages of her history. We shall see how deep an imprint they left on the nascent religion, literature, and art of Rome.

At first these plagues must needs have been endemic; and bred no doubt in the extensive swamps that lay within the city and around it for many miles, for Rome was not then a commercial city. Her corn she derived from Italy and Sicily, and held little or no intercourse with Egypt, until after the conquest of Carthage. Yet, in spite of the numerous records of her pestilences that have survived, there is not one the nature of which can be identified before the true Plague of Gregory the Great.

According to Plutarch<sup>1</sup> there was pestilence in Italy and Rome in the eighth year of Numa Pompilius (707 B.C.), forty-six years after the foundation of the city: the legend of it is full of interest. During its course a brazen buckler fell from heaven into the hands of Numa. Egeria and the Muses told him its meaning. It had been sent from heaven for the preservation of the city, and to prevent its theft eleven more were to be made so exactly like it, that no thief should be able to distinguish it from the rest. The immediate cessation of the pestilence seemed to verify this interpretation. One Veturius Mamurius successfully produced the eleven copies, and Numa gave charge of all the bucklers to the Salii, so called from the dance they led up the streets, when, in the month of March, they carried the sacred bucklers through the city. 'On that occasion', says Plutarch, 'they are habited in purple vests, girt with

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Numa.*

broad belts of brass : they wear also brazen helmets, and carry short swords, with which they strike upon the bucklers, and to those sounds they keep time with their feet. They move in an agreeable manner, performing certain involutions and evolutions in a quick measure, with vigour, agility, and ease. . . . The reward that Mamurius had for his art was, we are told, an ode, which the Salii sung in memory of him, along with the Pyrrhic dance. Some, however, say that it was not Veturius Mamurius, who was celebrated in that composition, but *vetus memoria*, the ancient remembrance of the thing.' The legend affords unmistakable evidence of some expiatory ceremony, first introduced for relief of a definite plague, but subsequently, in view of the constant recurrence, performed twice a year. Plutarch omits one significant feature of the Salic ritual, the driving of a skin-clad man, called Mamurius Veturius (the old Mars), through the streets, while the Salii showered blows on him, and drove him out of the city. The examples in ancient folk-lore<sup>1</sup> of animal and human scapegoats, for the exorcising of pestilence are so numerous, that we may well seek the interpretation of this Salic ceremony in the persistence of this conception. The dancing, singing, and clashing of shields was perhaps intended to drive out the evil demon from the city as a preliminary to transferring it to the scapegoat Mamurius. At Tanagra, the youth who annually carried a ram on his shoulders round the walls of the city, did so as a representative of the Ram-bearing Hermes, who averted a plague in this same fashion.<sup>2</sup>

Plutarch discusses the meaning of these bucklers, called Ancilia, so it was said, from their curved form (*ἀγκύλον*). He suggests as alternative derivations, *ἀνέκαθεν* = from on high : or *ἄκεις* = healing of sick : or *αὐχμῶν λύσις* = putting an end to drought : or *ἀνάσχεσις* = deliverance from calamities. But whatever the etymological significance,

<sup>1</sup> Frazer, *Golden Bough*.

<sup>2</sup> Pausanias, ix. 22. 1.



their ritual purpose would seem to have been to ward off the darts and arrows of pestilence, and the Salic ceremonial was dedicated to the honour of the sender. God he was not, for the religion of Numa's Rome knew no gods of human form: these were a later importation from the anthropomorphic religion of Greece. He was some *numen*, some power less personal than a god, but more personal than a spirit. It was he that engendered pestilence by his evil machinations. The legend brings us back again close to the confines of imitative magic. True, it is not the agent of pestilence that is fashioned, not the brazen serpent, not the mice, not the emerods, but the agent of deliverance, 'thy shield and buckler.'

In later years the Salii figure as colleges of priests, dedicated first to the worship of Mars, and later of Quirinus as well. The transformation served to obscure their true origin, which Plutarch asserts and which there is every reason to accept. Mars was not originally a god of war, but an agricultural god, and, like Apollo, a guardian of the crops. Coincidentally with the transformation the ritual assumed a more martial character, the Salii performing the war-dance in full fighting panoply, as the procession moved through the city twice a year, in March and October. The beginning and end of the season of pestilence had faded insensibly into the beginning and end of the campaigning season. Horace<sup>1</sup> recounts the aldermanic magnificence of their festive repast.

The hymn of the Salii was written in archaic Saturnian verse, fragments of which have come down to us. Quintilian<sup>2</sup> says that, by the first century B.C. the primitive language, passed down with verbal exactitude from generation to generation, had become unintelligible to those who ceremoniously recited it. One fragment is instructive in its significance:

Cumé tonas, Leucésie, prae tet tremonti,  
Quom tibeí cunei dextumúm tonárent.

<sup>1</sup> *Odes*, I. 37.

<sup>2</sup> I. vi. § 40.

(‘When thou thunderest, thou god of Light, they tremble at thy presence, when the lightning shafts have thundered from thy right hand.’) These lines recall the figure of Apollo the Far-Darter in the *Iliad*, and his invocation in the *Oedipus Tyrannus*.

Pestilence was in Rome again just before the death of Tullus Hostilius<sup>1</sup> in 640 B.C. Tullus himself fell ill; and in his illness revived every superstitious usage, though when in health he had affected to scorn religion. The people also cherished the conviction that only by obtaining pardon of the gods would they be rid of the pestilence. So Tullus consulted the commentaries of Numa, and finding that certain sacrifices should have been paid to Jupiter Elicius (*elicere* = to elicit information), he set about their performance. But as he failed to conduct them in due form, he not only failed of his purpose, but so roused the anger of Jupiter, that he struck him with lightning and reduced him and his whole household to ashes. Livy’s story of Tullus illustrates well the relation of a Roman to his god: it was a practical, not a spiritual relation, a bargain, not an act of grace. If the Roman paid all his dues of worship to the god he had a claim to repayment in full. Again and again, under the stress of pestilence, failure of the god to honour his bond drove the Roman to try his luck with alien gods. This is the spirit in which Tarquinius Superbus,<sup>2</sup> during another plague, in 514 B.C., sent his sons to Greek Delphi to inquire of the god how to be rid of it. Pestilence, in this manner, was destined to forge many a link in the chain that bound Rome to Greece.

In the fifth century B.C., Livy and Dionysius of Halicarnassus record a constant succession of plagues in Rome. Eight visitations, at least, are mentioned, and as some of these lingered over several years, Rome, in the fifth century,

<sup>1</sup> Livy, i. 31.

<sup>2</sup> Livy, i. 56, and Dion. Halic. *Antiq. Rom.* iv. 68.



can seldom have been free from pestilence. And yet all this time she was not only growing, but actually sending out colonies.

Of a plague in 473 B.C. we have an interesting recital by Dionysius of Halicarnassus.<sup>1</sup> 'In the beginning of the year', he writes, 'many prodigies and omens happened, which filled the city with superstition and fear of the gods: and all the augurs and the interpreters of holy things declared that these were signs of divine anger, because some rites had not been performed with sanctity and purity. Not long after, a distemper, supposed to be pestilential, attacked the women, particularly such as were with child, and more of them died than had ever been known before. For as they miscarried and brought forth dead children, they died together with their infants. And neither supplications at the statues and altars of the gods, nor expiatory sacrifices performed on behalf of the public and of private families gave the women any relief.' Thereupon a slave came forward and denounced Urbinia, one of the Vestal Virgins, who tended the perpetual fire, for impurity. The pontiffs at once removed her from her ministry, brought her to trial, convicted her, and condemned her 'to be whipped with rods, to be carried through the city, and buried alive'. One of her guilty lovers killed himself: the other was ordered to be publicly whipped like a slave, and then put to death. After this, 'the distemper, which had attacked the women and caused so great a mortality among them, presently ceased.' Again, the pestilence is attributed to the imperfect performance of some detail of ritual, which must be expiated forthwith, if the sender of the pestilence is to be appeased. Its special incidence on women seemed to bring home the guilt to them. It was meet therefore that a woman's life should be its expiation. Such is the earliest detailed record of human sacrifice for deliverance from plague, but we shall

<sup>1</sup> *Antiq. Rom.* ix. 40.

meet it again and again in the history of epidemic pestilence. Surely the tiger in man is but lightly prisoned in his human cage.

Human sacrifice was probably world-wide in the earliest ages of nations. The Phoenicians<sup>1</sup> resorted to it in times of national calamity, such as epidemic pestilence. There is abundant evidence from the Bible<sup>2</sup> and elsewhere, that human sacrifice was habitual in primitive Semitic religion. The Israelites were apt to assert that they learnt these practices from the peoples whom they superseded in the land of Canaan, but it must be remembered that they came of the same stock as these races. Pausanias<sup>3</sup> refers to the legend of Leos, who is said to have sacrificed his daughters, at the bidding of the oracle, to save Athens from a famine; and in speaking of the ruined city of Potniae<sup>4</sup> he says that the oracle of Delphi told them that they would get rid of a pestilence only by the sacrifice of a blooming boy to Dionysus, who had sent it for the murder of his priest. At the Athenian feast of Thargelia in May, a man and a woman were led through the city and stoned to death outside its walls, a man for the men, and a woman for the women: and a similar practice maintained in the Saturnalia at Rome. But with the advance of civilization animal substitutes came to replace the human victims.

Philostratus<sup>5</sup> cites another notable instance of human sacrifice for deliverance from pestilence. The Ephesians had summoned Apollonius (first century A.D.) to come and check the plague. On his arrival he at once set himself to encourage the citizens, and gathered them together to the theatre 'where now stands the statue of Avernuncus. Here they found an ill-looking old beggar, whom Apollonius ordered them to stone to death, as being the enemy of the

<sup>1</sup> Porphyry, *De Abstinencia*, ii. 56.

<sup>2</sup> Deuteronomy xii. 31; Leviticus xviii. 21; 2 Kings ii. 5-17.

<sup>3</sup> I. v. 2.

<sup>4</sup> IX. viii. 2.

<sup>5</sup> *Vita Apollonii*, iv. 10.



gods. As soon as they set to stoning him, fire darted from the old beggar's eyes, so that they knew him for a demon. After they had killed him, Apollonius ordered them to remove the stones from the corpse, and they found instead of a human body a fierce dog vomiting foam, as if mad. . . . The form this dog assumed was like that given to the statue of Avernuncus.'

The blood-lust of panic terror, which found its gratification in the slaying of Urbinia, is the lineal descendant of the cold-blooded ritual of human sacrifice: no human passion is so cruel as fear. But we shall fail to find even this palliation for the torture and killing of the 'unctores', both in Genoa and Milan, and for the wholesale massacre of Jews at the time of the Black Death, carried through by legal process far more deliberate, far more lengthy, far less impassioned than any rite of human sacrifice.

In the pestilence of 461 B.C. the mortality was so great that it became necessary to throw the dead bodies into the Tiber. Livy<sup>1</sup> says that a cattle epizootic preceded the epidemic, and that the necessity of admitting the cattle within the walls, owing to the invasion of Roman territory by the Aequans and Volscians, increased the malignity of the distemper. In this crisis of calamities, the Senate ordered the people to supplicate the protection of the gods. These 'supplications' took the form of expiatory processions, and seem to have been introduced from Greece to Rome. Like the Salic processions they moved to the sound of music and singing, as they visited the sanctuaries of the gods, prostrating themselves before their statues, clasping their knees and kissing their hands and feet. Livy<sup>2</sup> holds that the guardian gods and the city's good fortune saved Rome at this juncture, as fear of the pestilence induced the enemy to divert their attack to the richer and healthy Tusculan territory. Just before this outbreak Livy<sup>3</sup> says that the

<sup>1</sup> iii. 6.

<sup>2</sup> iii. 8.

<sup>3</sup> iii. 5.

sky seemed to be lit up by an exceeding bright light. It is not clear what celestial phenomenon he has in mind, but it is noteworthy as perhaps anticipating the fixed belief of later days in comets, as harbingers of pestilence.

The belief in astral influence over terrestrial phenomena and on the affairs of humanity was general and dates from prehistoric times. Hippocrates held that every physician should be versed in astrology. The dependence of season on the heavenly bodies, and the seasonal prevalence of epidemic disease were facts patent to every one, so that it was seemingly reasonable for the ancients to assert the influence of the heavenly bodies on disease, though when pushed to excessive lengths it became absurd. When pestilence was seldom absent, it must needs at times coincide with certain conjunctions of planets. How deeply the belief took root in medicine is shown by the words of the preface of the German *Herbarius*,<sup>1</sup> first published in A. D. 1485.

‘Many a time and oft have I contemplated inwardly the wondrous works of the Creator of the universe : how in the beginning He formed the heavens and adorned them with goodly, shining stars, to which He gave power and might to influence everything under heaven. Also how He formed afterwards the four elements : fire, hot and dry—air, hot and moist—water, cold and moist—earth, dry and cold—and gave to each a nature of its own : and how after this the same Great Master of Nature made and formed herbs of many sorts and animals of all kinds, and last of all Man, the noblest of all created things. Thereupon I thought on the wondrous order, which the Creator gave these same creatures of His, so that everything, which has its being under heaven, receives it from the stars, and keeps it by their help.’

Dionysius of Halicarnassus<sup>2</sup> records another fearful pestilence in 451 B. C., which carried off all the slaves and half the citizens of Rome. The pollution of the Tiber by the dead bodies seemed to intensify its ravages. Men and

<sup>1</sup> Agnes Arber, *Herbals*, 1912.

<sup>2</sup> *Antiq. Rom.* x. 53 ; and Livy, iv. 32.



cattle perished alike, in and around Rome, and famine followed, because the land was left untilld. As long as the people had any hopes in the assistance of their own gods, they approached them with sacrifices and all manner of expiation. But when these proved of no avail, they set themselves to introduce foreign innovations into the established religion of Rome. We shall see in the succeeding visitation, in what direction the disillusioned Romans first cast their eyes.

From 435-430 B. C. pestilence,<sup>1</sup> following on a drought and cattle epizootic, raged in Rome and the surrounding country beyond the power of human endurance. Frequent earthquakes preceded a great access of virulence in 431 B. C. : the very powers of nature seemed to have declared war on Rome. The people offered a general supplication to the gods, repeating the formulas word for word after the duumvirs, so that no mistake of word or syllable might invalidate the office : but in vain. So the worship of Apollo was brought from Greece to Rome, and a temple erected in his honour in 431 B. C. Apollo cannot have been a wholly unfamiliar god, for the Sibylline books must at least have introduced his name to Rome. But from this time he becomes naturalized as a leading Roman god. From his temple, in times of pestilence, expiatory processions paraded the streets of the city ; and as plague succeeds plague, he supplants step by step the older native gods.

In 395 B. C. pestilence <sup>2</sup> worked such havoc, that the Senate ordered the Sibylline books to be consulted. This collection of oracular utterances in Greek, given forth by inspired prophetesses or Sibyls (*Σίβυλλα*=Doric *Σιὸς βόλλα*=*Διὸς βουλή*=the will of the god), had found its way from the Troad to Cumae. Thence Tarquinius Superbus transferred part to Rome, and laid it up in sacred custody, to be used by order of the Senate, in times of national emergency.

<sup>1</sup> Livy, iv. 21-5.

<sup>2</sup> Livy, v. 13.

As these books recognized the gods and ritual of the Asiatic Greeks, they played a leading part in the introduction of Greek gods and Greek ritual into the religion of Rome. On this occasion the Sibylline books prescribed the celebration of a *lectisternium*.

The *lectisternium*, which now first appeared in Rome, was a festival of Greek origin. A public banquet of great magnificence was set before the deities, whose images were placed on couches. The exhibition of three pairs of alien gods, Apollo and Latona, Diana and Hercules, Mercury and Neptune, betrayed its foreign origin. The imaginative populace saw them accept the food or turn away from it in anger. Meantime domestic feasts were spread throughout the city, to which strangers and friends alike, and even liberated prisoners, came each to have his share. Doors lay open everywhere, offering a home to every casual comer. All things were had in common. No sound of discord marred the perfect peace. The people were admitted to solemn communion with the gods, as the Greek warriors before Troy shared with their gods in the eucharistic feast, in token that the plague was stayed.

Coincidentally with this epidemic at Rome, Diodorus Siculus<sup>1</sup> describes with some clinical detail a pestilence that attacked the Carthaginian army, while besieging Syracuse. The Lacedaemonians were assisting Dionysius and the Syracusans against the Carthaginians. The record is of interest as exhibiting Diodorus in the rôle of a flagrant plagiarist of Thucydides.

‘ But as to the Carthaginians, after they had ruined the suburbs and rifled and plundered the temples of Ceres and Proserpine, a plague seized upon the army, and to intensify and sharpen the vengeance of the gods upon them, both the season of the year and the multitudes of men crowded together contributed greatly to the aggravation of their misery : for the summer was hotter than ordinarily, and the

<sup>1</sup> xiv. 70.



locality itself occasioned the distemper to rage beyond all control. Not long before the Athenians were swept away in the self-same place by a plague, for it was marshy and low-lying ground. At the commencement of the distemper, before the sun rose, their bodies would fall a-shaking and trembling, through the coldness of the air that came off the water: but about noon they were stifled with the heat, because they were pent up so closely together. The south wind brought in the infection among them, and swept them away in heaps, but for a while they buried their dead. But when the number of the dead increased to such an extent that even those in attendance on the sick were cut off, none durst approach the infected, for the distemper seemed to be incurable. For first catarrhs and swellings about the neck (*περὶ τὸν τράχηλον οἰδήματα*) were caused by the stench of the bodies that lay unburied, and by the putrefaction of the soil. Then followed fever, pain in the muscles of the spine, heaviness of the limbs, dysentery and pustules (*φλύκταιναι*) over the surface of the whole body. The majority suffered in this manner, but others became raving mad and forgot everything, and rushing about distracted struck every one that they met. All the help of the physicians was in vain, both by reason of the violence of the distemper and the suddenness with which it carried many off: for in the midst of terrible suffering they commonly died on the fifth or at latest the sixth day: so that those who died in battle were accounted fortunate by all. And it was further a matter of observation, that all who attended on the sick died of the same distemper, and what aggravated the misery was that none would willingly come near the distressed and exhausted, to minister to them. For not only strangers, but even brothers and familiar friends were driven by fear of infection to forsake one another.'

Diodorus seems to have drawn on the clinical symptoms of several different diseases, to heighten the effect of his description. The combination of pustules on the body with swellings about the neck suggests true plague, but there the likeness ends. There are other descriptions of pestilence in Diodorus Siculus, that exhibit this same eclectic tendency.

In 363 B.C., after one or two intervening milder outbreaks, another period of pestilence<sup>1</sup> set in in Rome. Plutarch

<sup>1</sup> Livy, vii. 2.

says that it carried off a prodigious number of the people, most of the magistrates and Camillus himself. When all else failed to appease the gods, scenic plays were imported from Etruria. Hitherto the Roman people had had only the games of the circus. Livy describes their introduction to Rome in minute detail, tracing the development of regular stage plays from these rude scenic shows. 'Actors', he says, 'were sent for from Etruria, who without any song or imitative gestures regulated their movements by the measures of the music, and exhibited in Tuscan fashion by no means ungraceful dances.' To the ancients the movements of the body spoke a language as familiar as the movements of the tongue. 'It seemed to me', he continues, 'that the first origin of plays should be noticed, that it might appear how from a modest beginning they have reached their present extravagance. However, the first introduction of plays, intended as a religious expiation, neither relieved their minds from religious awe, nor their bodies from disease.' Indeed the Tiber inundated the circus and interrupted a performance, as though the gods despised their efforts at atonement. So popular amusement had come at last to supplant popular atonement, giving birth in the process to dramatic entertainment. In this respect we shall find history repeat itself with striking similarity in the plague times of the Middle Ages.

Such was the origin and the evolution of the scenic plays (*ludi scenici*), introduced in the first place to divert the mind and distract the spirit from the crushing catastrophe of pestilence. The visitation was followed by an earthquake, which is said to have opened a gaping abyss in the Forum, into which Manlius Curtius hurled himself in full armour—a willing human scapegoat sacrificed to the angry gods.

When these various measures failed to allay the pestilence, an old custom of driving a nail into the temple of Jupiter was solemnly revived. This practice in its inception pur-



posed to make a calendar of years. But once when a dictator had driven in the nail, forthwith a pestilence had ceased. So now it was urged that, if a dictator and no common magistrate drove in the nail, the pestilence would cease. So says Livy, but there is abundant evidence, both from ancient literature and from modern folk-lore, that he has missed the real significance of the act. We find traces of a world-wide belief in the possibility of transferring the evils of the body, as well as the evils of the soul, to some other being or animal, or thing. The scapegoat is familiar to all, and we know from Leviticus,<sup>1</sup> that at the cleansing of a leper the Jews let a bird fly away. Pliny<sup>2</sup> too tells us, that a Roman cure for epilepsy was to drive a nail into the ground, where the epileptic's head had struck it on falling: a similar cure for toothache was practised in France and Germany, and for ague in Suffolk.<sup>3</sup> In each instance the idea was to nail fast the evil thing, and so hinder it from returning to trouble its former host. A story given by L. Strackerjan,<sup>4</sup> and quoted by Frazer, comes even more closely to the point. During the Thirty Years' War pestilence came from Neuenkirchen, in Oldenburg, to a neighbouring farmhouse in the semblance of a blue vapour, and entering the house found its way into a hole in the door-post. The farmer seized a peg and hammered it into the hole, so that it should not come out. After a time he drew out the peg, believing the danger was past, but out came the blue vapour once more. Every member of the unhappy household fell a victim to the pestilence.

In 348 B.C. pestilence<sup>5</sup> was again rife, and a *lectisternium* was observed at the instance of the Sibylline books.

In 331 B.C. Rome was again in the grip of a devastating

<sup>1</sup> Leviticus xiv. 7, and 53.

<sup>2</sup> *Nat. Hist.* xxviii. 63.

<sup>3</sup> Frazer, *Golden Bough*, and E. C. Gurdon, *County Folk-lore, Suffolk*, p. 14.

<sup>4</sup> *Aberglaube und Sagen aus dem Herzogthum Oldenburg*, ii. 120, § 428.

<sup>5</sup> Livy, vii. 27.

pestilence.<sup>1</sup> Numbers of the Senate had already perished; when a female slave came to the aediles and declared that the victims had died of poison. She would show them matrons actually engaged in compounding poisons, and a store laid up in readiness for use. Sure enough, drugs were found in the possession of two women of patrician rank, Cornelia and Sergia, and in spite of their protest that these were harmless, they were compelled to swallow them, and fell victims to their own nefarious devices. One hundred and seventy matrons were implicated in their guilt, and paid the penalty with their lives. Rome offered a human holocaust to the spirit of panic fear.

The grim suspicion of poison was not now formulated for the first time, for the Athenians had suspected the Lacedaemonians of poisoning their wells. But now the charge appears as a deadly and insidious weapon, ready to the hand of every infamous or ill-disposed informer. The hideous catalogue of cruelties inflicted on innocent victims, under the spell of this illusion, forms a dark chapter in the history of epidemic pestilence.

In the face of another pestilence<sup>2</sup> in 312 B.C., a dictator was again appointed to drive a nail into the temple of Jupiter.

We have seen the succession of Rome's epidemics almost unbroken throughout the fourth and fifth centuries. We are accustomed to think of Roman character as trained in the school of interminable warfare, but we are apt to forget that there was another, a sterner and more desolating enemy, almost always alert within her gates, 'the pestilence that walketh in darkness.' In the perpetual struggle for existence on the stricken fields of battle and of pestilence, young Rome had found, as yet, no leisure for the loftier pursuits of the human intellect, and had developed no literature and no art of her own, worthy of either name. As Greek and Roman were alike children of one common stock, some strong abiding

<sup>1</sup> Livy, viii. 18.

<sup>2</sup> Livy, ix. 28.



influences must have been at work, leading development along widely divergent paths : and perhaps in epidemic pestilence, with which Greece was but little familiar till the end of the fifth century at least, we may look for one such agency.

In 295 B.C., during a fierce pestilence, Livy<sup>1</sup> says that the consul's son built a temple to Venus, close to the circus out of fines inflicted on some matrons convicted of adultery, as though their sin was believed to be its cause. In the Middle Ages likewise we shall find many churches built in commemoration of particular plagues.

Only two years later a violent pestilence<sup>2</sup> drove the magistrates to consult the Sibylline books, and in obedience to their instruction ambassadors were sent from Rome to Epidaurus to demand the serpent of Aesculapius, in which the god seemed to be incarnate. At first nothing was done beyond devoting one day to the supplication of Aesculapius. But in the following year ambassadors set out under the leadership of Quintus Ogulnius<sup>3</sup> and on arrival at Epidaurus were taken to the temple of Aesculapius, and invited to carry away whatever was needed to rescue their city from pestilence. Thereupon the serpent, which rarely appeared to the Epidaurians, presented itself for three days in the most public parts of the city, and then of its own accord made its way to the Roman galley, in which it was transported to Antium, after the ambassadors had been instructed how to pay honour to the god. After a brief sojourn there it re-entered the Roman galley, and scarce had they reached the Tiber, when it swam to the island in mid-stream, where a temple was dedicated afterwards to Aesculapius. A coin of Commodus<sup>4</sup> and a medallion of Antoninus (see Plate I, p. 4) survive to commemorate the event. To this day there may be seen on some large blocks of stone, moulded

<sup>1</sup> x. 31.

<sup>2</sup> Livy, x. 47, and *Epit. Lib.* xi.

<sup>3</sup> Valerius Maximus, i. 8.

<sup>4</sup> See Duruy, *History of Rome*, i. 555.

to the shape of the poop of a ship, on the Isola Tiberina, the head of an effigy of Aesculapius in relief, with the serpent twined round his staff.

So it was pestilence that brought Aesculapius to Rome, as it had brought Apollo before him. In this temple in the Tiber the healing ritual of the god flourished for some centuries, and in recent excavations many votive emblems of diseased parts of the body have been brought to light. With few intervals, and those of no long duration, the island has been dedicated to works of healing down to the present day. Claudius ordained that sick slaves should be exposed on the island, and those that recovered were to receive their freedom. The hospital of S. Giovanni Calabita, founded in 1575, stands there still. In 1656 the whole island was converted into a lazaretto for the victims of the plague.

It was the constant custom of the priests of Epidaurus, in founding a new shrine to send out one of the sacred snakes from the sanctuary. Pausanias<sup>1</sup> describes the coming of Aesculapius from Epidaurus to Sicyon, in the form of a snake, in a car drawn by a pair of mules.

Before his transference to Rome, Aesculapius had already attained all the attributes of divinity. He had ceased to be a mere god-man by the time that his worship reached Athens from Epidaurus (420 B.C.). So far was his serpent origin forgotten, that the Greeks explained his association with the serpent by the suggestion that medicine, like the serpent, reappeared annually in a fresh integument.

In computing the number of epidemics that visited Rome Livy is the chief authority, and in doing so it must be borne in mind that his work is incomplete. Epitomes only survive of the books dealing with the years from 293 to 219 B.C., and of those again from 167 B.C. to the end of his history in the middle of the reign of Augustus. That there was no cessation of the frequent recurrence of pestilence may

<sup>1</sup> ii. 10. 3.



reasonably be inferred from the regularity of appearance in those intervening years, of which his complete histories survive.

In 212 B.C. Livy<sup>1</sup> describes simultaneous pestilence at Syracuse and at Rome. The Roman general, Marcellus, was besieging Syracuse, when pestilence fell both on besiegers and besieged. The Carthaginian and Sicilian armies, however, suffered more than the Romans, who retired within the walls to recruit their health. The Sicilians also shook it off by dispersing to their cities, but it continued to rage among the Carthaginians, who had no place to which to retire. Livy's description of the neglect of the dead recalls that of Thucydides, but the similarity of expression is not so close as to make it certain that he has borrowed directly from Thucydides. He writes: 'At last their feelings had become so completely brutalized by being habituated to these miseries, that they not only did not follow their dead with tears and decent lamentations, but they did not even carry them out and bury them: so that the bodies of the dead lay strewn about, exposed to the view of those who were awaiting a similar fate. And thus the dead were the means of destroying the sick, and the sick those who were in health, both by fear and by the filthy state and the noisome stench of their bodies. Some, preferring to die by the sword, even rushed upon the outposts of the enemy.' Livy might well have been describing the scenes in the streets of Marseilles during the plague of A.D. 1720. Silius Italicus<sup>2</sup> has described this pestilence, as well as Livy, but his is a mere poetic picture of its fancied incidence first on dogs, next on birds, then on wild beasts, and finally on man.

The Ludi Apollinares also were instituted in 212 B.C., but Livy states that they were instituted in commemoration of the victory in arms, and not because of the restoration of a state of healthiness, as is commonly supposed. In the circumstances the one proposition need hardly exclude the other.

<sup>1</sup> xxv. 26-8.

<sup>2</sup> *Punic War*, v. 580-626.

For three full years, from 183 to 180 B.C., pestilence<sup>1</sup> raged in Rome, carrying off both high and low. The people saw in it a sign of celestial anger, and the Pontifex Maximus ordered that the Sibylline books should be consulted. Gilded statues and offerings were duly vowed to the healing deities, Apollo, Aesculapius, and Hygieia, who for long years in the person of Athena had stood as protectress of the health of Athens. Pestilence had now brought her to Rome. A supplication was celebrated in town and surrounding country by all above the age of twelve, the suppliants wearing chaplets on their heads and carrying in their hands boughs of the laurel, sacred to Apollo. Suspicions of poison were freely bruited in the city, and Valerius of Antium says that an investigation actually resulted in the condemnation of two thousand persons, and among them Quarta Hostilia, wife of the consul who had died of the pestilence. So splendid an atonement must needs appease the angered gods.

In 176-175 B.C. pestilence was again severe in Rome. Livy's<sup>2</sup> account of it is interesting, because he states that, in spite of the great mortality among cattle and men, there were no vultures to be seen in either year of the pestilence. Taking the observation in its context it reads as though the vultures were the first to suffer, so that they were exterminated locally, then the cattle, and afterwards man, and with him probably his dog. Thucydides had already drawn attention to the absence of vultures during the plague of Athens, and with the passage of years the observation crystallized into an article of faith pertinent to all and every pestilence. In the case of the plague of Aleppo Russell definitely negatives the observation.

With the conclusion of Livy's history we enter on a barren period in the history of Roman pestilence, and we may turn for a while to some aspects of pestilence presented by ancient Latin poetry.

<sup>1</sup> Livy, xxxix. 41 ; xl. 19 ; xl. 37.

<sup>2</sup> xli. 21.



## CHAPTER IV

INTO his great poem 'On the Nature of Things' (*De Rerum Natura*) Lucretius has grafted a description of the plague of Athens, converting the record of Thucydides into Latin hexameter verse. His prime motive in its introduction is to show that the chief phenomena of nature, and pestilence as one of these, all harmonize with the atomic theory, that he has adopted from Democritus and Epicurus. Lucretius indeed propounds an atomic explanation of pestilence, consonant in its main features with the doctrines of his contemporary Asclepiades. We can reason of the imperceptible, he argues, only from our knowledge of the perceptible. Our eyes see clouds descend from the sky, and noxious vapours rise as mists from the land. Our minds then may not unreasonably infer, that pestilence also either comes down from heaven by the medium of clouds, or rises up from the rain-sodden earth by the medium of mist. In each manner the atmosphere becomes impregnated with noxious atoms that distemper it. These particles enter our bodies, either by the air we breathe, or by the food and drink they have contaminated, and thus provoke infection. Such, he holds, was the cause of the plague of Athens.

The views of Lucretius as to the proximate causes of pestilence are almost identical with those of his contemporary, Diodorus Siculus. With each of them moisture, as cloud or mist, distempers the air or damages food, and so finds entry into lungs or stomach. With each an ill wind may engender pestilence: with Lucretius, by bringing a harmful to replace a beneficent atmosphere: with Diodorus Siculus, by failing to cool the air to an appropriate temperature, thus causing fever. To Lucretius clouds, mists, and

winds are carriers of noxious particles. In this atomic theory of infection he faintly foreshadows the doctrine of particulate poisons, that held the field of scientific speculation within the memory of living men. But even so Lucretius came less near the truth than his great contemporary Varro,<sup>1</sup> who actually ascribes disease in animals to living organisms beyond the range of human vision ('crescunt animalia quaedam minúta, quae non possunt oculi consequi, et per aera, intus per os ac nares perveniunt atque efficiunt difficiles morbos').

To Lucretius pestilence is a purely natural process, in which there is no place for the handiwork of gods. Of this theme, in varying applications, he is a fierce exponent throughout the length and breadth of his poem. Perhaps it is for this reason that he chose the narrative of Thucydides as the basis of his poem, for Thucydides, too, referred epidemic pestilence to natural causation, not to the special act of any god. Like Thucydides, too, Lucretius accepts without reserve the doctrine of contagion :

Qui fuerant autem praesto contagibus ibant  
Atque labore.

(Those who had stayed near at hand would die of contagion and the toil.)

Pestilence, too, affords Lucretius a rare text for the exposure of the hollow sham of state-worship, which represented now all that survived of religion in Rome. We have seen how much of Roman religion had its origin from time to time in the necessity of exorcising pestilence : and we have seen how popular superstition revived the ritual of popular atonement. Now the Sibylline books are consulted. Now a nail is driven into the temple of Jupiter. Now Apollo is brought to Rome, and a temple erected in his honour. Now Aesculapius comes in the form of a serpent to deliver Rome : now Hygieia. Now sacrifices are offered and feasts set out before

<sup>1</sup> *De Re Rustica*, i. 12.



the statues of the gods. This is the fabric that Lucretius, fired with iconoclastic zeal, would fain demolish, not as the enemy of religion, but as the ruthless enemy of religious sham.

In literary form this part of the great Lucretian poem falls far below the rest. The poem as a whole possesses a rugged grandeur of its own, but this terminal portion, while retaining all the ruggedness, has lost most of the grandeur. It gives the impression of having been merely rough cast, to await the polishing, which, owing to the premature death of the poet in 55 B.C., it never received. Fault also may be found with the literary substance, for in places he misunderstands the language of Thucydides, and misrepresents his meaning. Again, he incorporates here and there fragments of Hippocrates and fancies of his own into the record of Thucydides, as though all disease presented a single clinical facies. For example, he reproduces as *cor* the *καρδία* of Thucydides, which the latter used, as did Hippocrates, for the cardiac end of the stomach. Again, he misinterprets Thucydides with regard to the effect of the disease on the extremities. He represents *στερισκόμενοι τούτων* as *ferro privati*, whereas clearly Thucydides means that the parts sloughed off, not that they were amputated. It would seem that Lucretius was versed in the Greek language of his day, but that language was no longer the Greek of Thucydides and Plato. Nor does Lucretius scorn the full licence that Horace accords to the poet, and exigencies of metre sometimes compel him not to adhere strictly to his model: thus he transforms the critical days into the eighth and ninth. One long passage beginning

*Multaque praeterea mortis tum signa dabantur*  
consists of various excerpts from Hippocrates turned into Latin verse. These are gathered from such diverse parts of the Hippocratic writings, as to indicate considerable acquaintance with them. The lineaments of the Hippocratic

facies are reproduced in detail. The fact is that Lucretius was more anxious for the picturesqueness than for the accuracy of his description, provided always that the logical soundness of the main thesis and its didactic purpose were not compromised thereby.

In his picture of the mythical plague that afflicted the people of Aegina, Ovid<sup>1</sup> exacts contributions alike from Thucydides, Lucretius, and Vergil, while there are certain features that bear a strong resemblance to Diodorus Siculus. His story is that Minos, King of Crete, the second king of the name; goes in quest of allies to the island of Aegina, and courts unsuccessfully the aid of its king Aeacus. As soon as he has departed, Cephalus comes as ambassador from Athens and obtains help from Aeacus, who gives him an account of the pestilence that had formerly raged in Aegina, and dwells on its marvellous repeopling. Ovid maintains sufficient independence of his models for us to be able to gather something at least of current ideas of pestilence, set though it is in an atmosphere of antiquity. At first the disease was referred to natural causation and so was combated by medicines :

Dum visum mortale malum tantaeque latebat  
Causa nocens cladis, pugnatum est arte medendi.  
Exitium superabat opem, quae victa iacebat.

The tendency was now to regard pestilence as a natural process, until it overstepped habitual limitations, and triumphantly defied the resources of orthodox medicine. Then popular imagination saw in it the hand of a god, and forthwith set it outside the confines of recognized pathology. So now Ovid ascribes the Aeginetan plague to the anger of Juno, because the island was named after her adulterous rival Aegina, who was carried there by Jupiter, and by him became the mother of Aeacus, King of Aegina. But side by side with this Ovid lays stress on various meteorological

<sup>1</sup> *Metamorphoses*, vii. 520 seq.



phenomena, that accompanied or preluded the pestilence—the earth encompassed with gross darkness, a drowsy heat in the clouds, and persistent hot winds, as though he believed in some close causal connexion. He conceives the virus to be communicable in water, for fountains and lakes were deemed to be infected, and the rivers tainted with the venom of innumerable snakes. He dwells at length on the epizootic, and elaborates this feature far more even than Livy, and true to the habitual character of Roman pestilence, he makes it precede the human epidemic. He holds fast the doctrine of contagion, which he conceives to be transmitted by the dead as well as the living. Ovid's description of pestilence unmasks his shallow nature. He shows himself to be no more and no less than an elegant literary trifler. One feels in the easy flow of his verse and the light vagaries of his picturesque imagination an unconcern and indifference to the horrible realities he handles. He has no power, like Thucydides, to plumb the depths of pathos, and the reader turns from his catalogue of sufferings with no emotion of horror, still less with one of sympathy. One looks in vain for some vestige of the moral earnestness of Lucretius. Even for his deities the springs of action reside in the lowlier human passions. Caprice and jealousy move Juno to send the pestilence: humanity is the sport of these infirmities. When man's conception of Divine Providence had sunk so low, it was well that Imperial Rome should be without religion.

Manilius, in his *Astronomica*,<sup>1</sup> composed about the Christian era, asserts with confidence, that comets presage pestilence. The belief is probably far older than Manilius, though it is difficult to cite exact authorities. Livy<sup>2</sup> speaks of a bright light in the sky before the plague of 462 B.C.; 'coelum ardere visum est plurimo igni': and Dionysius of Halicarnassus<sup>3</sup> recounts the lighting up of a fire in the heavens before that of 458 B.C.: ἐν οὐρανῷ σέλα φερόμενα καὶ πυρὸς

<sup>1</sup> Bk. I.<sup>2</sup> iii. 5.<sup>3</sup> x. 2.

ἀνάψει. Allusions such as these would seem to signify the appearance of a comet. Vergil<sup>1</sup> is even more explicit :

Non secus ac liquida si quando nocte cometae  
Sanguinei lugubre rubent, aut Sirius ardor,  
Ille sitim morbosque ferens mortalibus aegris  
Nascitur, et laevo contristat lumine coelum.

Of their supposed malign influence on human affairs in general there is no doubt. Tacitus<sup>2</sup> assigns to them even a political significance, for he says that in popular opinion they always portend a revolution to kingdoms.

Seneca,<sup>3</sup> in his *Physical Science*, makes the specific statement that 'after great earthquakes it is usual for a pestilence to occur'. The concurrence of the two had been mentioned previously by Thucydides, Diodorus Siculus, Livy, and others, but Seneca would seem to be the first to attempt to define the exact relation of the one to the other. In the Campanian earthquake of A.D. 63 a flock of 600 sheep had perished mysteriously, near Pompeii. Seneca conceives that earthquakes liberate poisonous fumes imprisoned in the earth, or pent up in marshes, which serve to taint the air. Flocks suffer most, he thinks, because they live in the open, and also drink the poison-laden water. They feed too with heads close to the ground and so receive the concentrated venom, before it has become diluted: and then he adds: 'If it had issued in greater volume, it would have injured man too, but the abundant supply of pure air counteracted it, before it could rise high enough to be breathed by any human being.' And he proceeds: 'The better is ever conquered by the worse. Even that pure air of heaven changes then to pestilential. Thence come sudden and continuous deaths, and portentous forms of disease, that spring from unexampled causes. The disaster is long- or short-lived according

<sup>1</sup> *Aeneid*, x. 272 seq.

<sup>2</sup> *Annals*, xiv. 22.

<sup>3</sup> *Quaestiones Naturales*, vi. 27. 28, and Seneca, *Physical Science*, Clarke and Geikie.



to the strength of the sources of infection. Nor does the plague cease, until the freedom of heaven and the tossing of the winds have banished that fatal air.'

Seneca had probably stumbled on the true explanation of the death of the Campanian sheep, for Geikie says that after an eruption of Mount Vesuvius the escape of carbonic acid gas has been known to suffocate hundreds of hares, partridges, and pheasants. Seneca, in conformity with the learned opinion of his time, regards volcanoes and earthquakes as closely allied phenomena. Earthquakes were regarded as the product in the main of violent commotion of the air. Niebuhr, like Seneca, expressed a firm belief in earthquakes and volcanic eruptions as causes of pestilence, a thesis that many writers have sought to substantiate. It is tempting, even to-day, to speculate on migrations of rats set in motion by subterranean activity. But a careful survey of a sufficient series of earthquakes and plagues lends little support to such a proposition. Each may occur alike before or after, with or without the other, and their frequent concurrence in ancient history denotes no more than that the eyes of historians were focused, almost exclusively, on a narrow tract of land around the shores of the Mediterranean, in which earthquakes were and are notoriously of frequent occurrence. Two years after the great earthquake Campania was devastated by a hurricane, and Rome desolated by pestilence. Tacitus<sup>1</sup> says that the pestilence swept away 'all classes of human beings without any such derangement of the atmosphere as to be visibly apparent. Yet the houses were filled with dead bodies and the streets with funerals.' Tacitus declares unhesitatingly for the production of pestilence by natural and not by supernatural agency.

The year A.D. 79 is ever memorable for the destruction of Herculaneum and Pompeii. It was followed by pestilence,

<sup>1</sup> *Annals*, Bk. XVI.

which Dion Cassius attributes to ashes from Vesuvius. Dust had been suspect from the remotest ages of antiquity. At the time of the Exodus Moses was told to sprinkle dust before heaven. 'And it shall become dust in all the land of Egypt, and shall be a boil breaking forth with blains upon man.' Livy and Plutarch each attributed the plague that broke out among the Gauls, when besieging Rome under Brennus, to the dust and ashes of the houses they had burnt. Philo, too, ascribes a pestilence of about the year A.D. 92 to hot dust irritating the skin.

Dion Cassius<sup>1</sup> mentions a plague that broke out in the reign of Domitian (A.D. 81-96), and which may be the same as that mentioned by Philo. 'Certain individuals', he says, 'poisoned needles and set to work to prick whomsoever they wished: several who were pricked died without knowing anything about it: but some of the scoundrels were denounced and punished; and that happened not only in Rome, but over all the world so to say.' Some initial punctiform eruption may perhaps have simulated a needle-prick. Belief in the dissemination of pestilence by the cutaneous inoculation of poison was destined to flourish for many centuries. Dion Cassius<sup>2</sup> himself repeats the statement in the case of another pestilence in the reign of Commodus (A.D. 187): 'In the reign of Commodus occurred the most violent sickness I have ever known: at Rome two thousand persons often died in a single day. But many died, not only in Rome, but in all parts of the empire, in another manner: scoundrels, poisoning little needles with certain noxious substances, transmitted the disease in this way for pay: this had been done already in the reign of Domitian.' For three years then famine and pestilence worked hand in hand to ruin Rome, and the people in their fury clamoured for a victim. A pleasant sacrifice was handy in the Phrygian freedman

<sup>1</sup> lxvii. 11.

<sup>2</sup> lxxii. 14.



Cleander, the greedy and infamous minister of Commodus. It was eagerly bruited that Cleander had hoarded wheat, and the maddened populace, surging to the palace of Commodus, clamoured for the head of the hated favourite. The Emperor, fearful for his own life, at the instance of the women of his court demanded that the head of Cleander should be thrown from the palace to the people. The spectacle of this bloody expiation appeased the fury of the rabble. On the advice of his physicians<sup>1</sup> Commodus himself beat a hasty retreat to Laurentum, to seek an antidote in the scent of its abundant laurels. Those who remained in Rome filled their noses and ears with sweet ointments, to neutralize the pestilential exhalations from infected bodies and from the contagious atmosphere. At last a Roman emperor is found, in presence of pestilence, consulting—not the Sibylline books, not the oracle, not the omens—but a physician, and obeying his instruction. Medicine has tardily come into her own, and Pliny's sarcasm, that Rome prospered for 600 years without physicians, has lost its sting. But we shall see presently that the hour for professional exaltation is not yet.

The great Antonine plague—the long plague, as Galen calls it, for it lasted no less than fifteen years<sup>2</sup>—was brought to Rome from the East by the Syrian army of Verus, about A.D. 165. Ammianus Marcellinus<sup>3</sup> sets its commencement in the sacrilegious folly of some Roman soldiers at the sack of the city of Seleucia. These men wrenched from its site a statue of Apollo, and from a narrow aperture beneath its pedestal the pestilence escaped, carrying death wherever it went. Julius Capitolinus (c. A.D. 300) confirms the statement of Ammianus Marcellinus, except in that he traces the source of origin to a small golden coffer in this same temple of Apollo. Carried thence by the victorious army

<sup>1</sup> Herodian, Bk. I.

<sup>2</sup> Evagrius, *Hist.* iv. 28.

<sup>3</sup> xxiii. 7.

to Rome, it found there conditions favourable to its propagation in an already existing famine, in the accumulation of the soldiery, and in the concourse of spectators, who had come to see the triumph of the joint emperors duly celebrated. Of the mortality at Rome no figures exist, but it is said to have been very great. Dead bodies were so numerous, that they were carried to burial heaped up in carts. Aurelius<sup>1</sup> paid the dead the tribute of a public funeral, and erected statues to the memory of many men of high estate. His philosophy, though proof against religious belief, showed itself not proof against religious superstition. The whole pagan ritual of expiation was paraded on behalf of the distracted city. The neglected worship of the gods was revived with renewed vigour, and the aid of those most powerful to help in such circumstances was eagerly invoked. A lustration was solemnly performed for the purification of the city, and a *lectisternium* celebrated for seven whole days. The people were readily infected with the contagion of their sovereign's superstition, and from this time may be dated a brief revival of the worship of the effete pagan deities. Aurelius sought even to appease the anger of the national gods by a persecution of the Christians, whose religion was an insult to their majesty. The Christian chronicler, Orosius,<sup>2</sup> attributes the pestilence actually to the persecution of the Christians that had broken out in Asia and Gaul before its commencement. All that is known for certain is, that such a persecution was a consequence, if not a cause as well. An engraved blood-coloured jasper, preserved in Paris, and figured in the *Histoire de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, survives to commemorate the sacrifices by which Marcus Aurelius sought to charm away the plague. Duruy<sup>3</sup> describes its features :

‘ Marcus Aurelius as sovereign pontiff : on his veiled head a globe, symbol of his sovereign power : behind him

<sup>1</sup> Merivale, *Hist. of Rome*, vii. 578.

<sup>2</sup> vii. 15.

<sup>3</sup> *Hist. of Rome*, v. 186.



an augur's staff: facing the Emperor Rome helmeted and Aesculapius with horns: under Aurelius, Hygieia or Health: lastly the head of Faustina. The Sagittarius, who occupies the centre, marks the time of the sacrifices, offered in November or December.'

Some have inferred from a passage of Julius Capitolinus that Marcus Aurelius himself died of this pestilence in A.D. 180. In describing his death-bed, Capitolinus says that he took a hasty farewell of his son, for fear of communicating his malady to him.

Niebuhr considers that the ancient world never recovered from the havoc of this pestilence. To it he traces the decadence of Roman literature and art in the years that followed, and points to analogous results in Greece from the plague of Athens, and in early German and early Florentine literature from the Black Death of A.D. 1348. But the seeds of decay in the empire of Rome had already been sown, as they had been in the empire of Athens before the Peloponnesian War. Pericles himself had warned the Athenians at the outset of the far-reaching consequences of failure. We shall see too hereafter that in the case of the early Florentine literature other more potent influences than pestilence were concerned in its temporary effacement. The lesson to be learnt from a comprehensive survey of the history of pestilence would seem rather to be this, that with the community, as with the individual, the sound constitution throws off the effects of a sickness that strikes right home, when the resisting power is impaired. Such was assuredly the case with the interminable sequence of plagues that assailed Rome in adolescence as well as in adult life. But as decadence and decrepitude beset the body politic, the wounds of pestilence went deeper and left abiding scars.

The Antonine plague bequeathed one ill-starred legacy to the profession of medicine. Every sovereign has the physicians he deserves, and Galen was physician to Marcus Aurelius. At the first onset of the pestilence Galen made

off to Campania, and finding no safety there took ship to Pergamus. Thence, after two years' absence, he returned at the summons of the emperors, and after a brief stay in Rome joined them at Aquileia, where pestilence tracked him down again.

Cowards die many times before their death.

Courage, however, and medical acumen are by no means constant companions, and for many centuries, in face of pestilence, physicians, and among them Morgagni and Sydenham, were doomed to follow the example of Galen as faithfully as they cherished his precepts.

Galen has been regarded generally as the leading authority on the medical aspects of the Antonine plague, but the value of Galen's testimony is not enhanced by the investigation of these attendant circumstances. The physician who takes flight at the outset is little likely subsequently to observe the disease carefully, constantly, and at close quarters: nor is it surprising to find that much of his symptomatology is borrowed directly either from Thucydides or Hippocrates. The striking picture of Thucydides must needs dominate the mind of the man who studies medicine in his arm-chair, so that we are prepared to find Galen asserting the identity of the Antonine pestilence with the plague of Athens. Here and there passages are lifted almost *verbatim* from Thucydides. For example, Galen<sup>1</sup> says that the sick man's body did not seem hotter than normal to the touch, but that he suffered an intolerable inward burning. The skin was not yellow, but reddish and livid. The transference of οὔτε χλωρόν from Thucydides shows that he is copying Thucydides, and is not describing what he himself saw. Again, the description of the eruption, though far more precise and complete than that by Thucydides, shows his influence closely, and now and again falls into his

<sup>1</sup> *Commentar. I. in Hippocrat. Lib. VI, Epidem. Aph. 29.*



actual words, as in ἐξήνθησεν ἑλκεσιν ὅλον τὸ σῶμα. The same also is true of the more general symptoms<sup>1</sup> of the disease, such as the insistence on the characteristic appearance of the inflamed eyes, and the redness of mouth, tongue, and fauces.

There is the ring of the charlatan, too, in Galen's use and advocacy of Armenian bole as an anti-pestilential specific, in striking contrast to the crude disavowal of all remedies by Thucydides. Galen<sup>2</sup> says that 'all those who used it were promptly cured'—one wonders at Galen's flight—'those who felt no effect from it died: no other remedy could replace it'—and then he sublimely concludes, 'that those, with whom the remedy failed, were incurable.' This Armenian bole was merely an argillaceous earth brought from Persia and Armenia, which owed its red colour to oxide of iron. Galen used it as an astringent for wounds and ulcers before he vaunted it as a specific for pestilence. Internally, at any rate, it must have been almost inert in medicinal doses, and as Galen adduces no evidence in support of his crude dictum, we need be at no pains to justify our incredulity.

There is reason to think that the Antonine plague was not one and the same disease throughout its course. Had it been so, we should have expected from Galen something in the nature of a single clinical picture, rather than casual references scattered throughout his voluminous writings.

In describing the character of the eruption and its transformations, Galen<sup>3</sup> certainly seems to have small-pox in mind. At a certain stage the eruption broke out all over the body in the form of ἐξανθήματα μέλανα (a dark efflorescence), probably of haemorrhagic type. When it ulcerated,

<sup>1</sup> *De Praesag. ex pulsibus*, iii. 4.

<sup>2</sup> *De Simplicium Medicamentorum Temperamentis et Facultatibus*, ix. 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Method. Medendi*, v. 12.

a crust (ἐφελκίς) formed on the surface, which became detached, and then everything proceeded to a cure. A scar remained after the separation of the crust, comparable to the 'pitting' of small-pox. In some cases ulceration did not occur, but the exanthem was rough and scaly and became detached like a skin: in this condition all got well. Galen gives some indication of the course of the disease in one who recovered. 'A young man on the ninth day had his whole body covered with ulcers, as had most of those who recovered. Then he was seized with a cough, and three days after the ninth he was in a condition to go into the country for convalescence.' The day after the cough set in, he expelled during a paroxysm of coughing a crust just like those of the cutaneous ulcers. Galen had previously examined his mouth and fauces, and had detected no signs of ulceration. He could also swallow both liquids and solids without any difficulty. To determine whether the crust came from his gullet or no, Galen administered a draught of vinegar and mustard; and from the absence of pain attending this drastic procedure he concluded that it must have come from the larynx and not from the gullet. Destructive ulcerations of the larynx have been recorded in rare instances in the course of small-pox, but such a condition would certainly preclude a journey to the country after the lapse of two days. It would be less impossible after the expulsion of a diphtheritic membrane.

It would be unprofitable to follow Galen further into the features of the pestilential fever he details, for, as we have said, it is quite uncertain that these are the features of a single disease. Indeed, apart from the evidence of Galen's writings, it would be reasonable to presume the reverse from such knowledge as we have of other prolonged periods of pestilence.

Before leaving Galen we may say that he postulates a dual causation of pestilence: on the one hand, great irregularity of the seasons inducing a pestilential state of



the atmosphere: on the other, a vitiated condition of the human body, due to contaminated food, rendering it liable to fever from very slight causes. The atmospheric factor, no doubt, would seem to be confirmed by the universality of the disease, while the greater severity of the disease and perhaps its special incidence as well among the ill-fed and destitute would seem to incriminate the resisting power of the individual.

The plague of A.D. 252, during the joint imperially of Gallus and Hostilian, rivalled the Antonine pestilence both in virulence and duration. Hostilian was one of the first victims, though his death was commonly ascribed to the hand of Gallus. Eusebius<sup>1</sup> says that the disease had already worked havoc in Alexandria and Egypt, before it reached Rome. In some cities of Rome and Greece the daily mortality rose as high as 5,000,<sup>2</sup> and with greater or less virulence the disease spread over the whole known world.<sup>3</sup> Eusebius attributes the pestilence to moulds deposited from the air, a belief that we shall meet again in the course of the Great Plague of London.

Cyprian, the Christian bishop of Carthage, has left us some details of the symptoms in his eloquent homily 'De Mortalitate', which St. Augustine admired so greatly. Eusebius and Cyprian are both intent on extolling the self-sacrificing zeal with which the Christians laid down their lives in the service of the sick. Their writings help us to appreciate the contempt of suffering generated in the mind of the early enthusiasts of Christianity by living perpetually in the presence of persecution and in the fear of death. We know from the manner in which Cyprian<sup>4</sup> yielded himself to the sword of the executioner that the spirit of the 'Sermo de Mortalitate' permeated his whole being. In

<sup>1</sup> *Hist. Eccles.* vii. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Trebellius Pollio, *Gallienus*, tom. ii.

<sup>3</sup> Pomponius Laetus, *Rom. Hist.* tom. ii.

<sup>4</sup> Pontius, *Vita Caecilii Cypriani*.

this sermon we may still read the glowing appeal of Cyprian to his hearers to seek courage and consolation in repentance for their sins.

Cedrenus<sup>1</sup> was so impressed with the infectiveness of the disease that he believed it might be communicated by a look, as Plato had conceived to be true of ophthalmia. Trebellius Pollio<sup>2</sup> recounts the association of terrestrial and other portents. Volcanoes awoke to fresh activity: earthquakes occurred and rumblings of the earth were heard: the sky was darkened for days: chasms yawned in the ground: great tidal waves overwhelmed many cities. It seemed as though the end of the world, foretold by the Christians, was at hand. In Rome the Sibylline books were consulted, and they prescribed the easy atonement of a sacrifice to Jupiter Salutaris.

Eusebius<sup>3</sup> is the chief authority for the pestilence of A. D. 302, during the reign of Maximian. It was accompanied by famine, so that the people were reduced to eating grass, and as many died of starvation as of disease. The famished dogs fought over the corpses of the dead, and the people slaughtered them wholesale, lest they should go mad and attack the living.

<sup>1</sup> *Compend. Historiarum, ex versione Xylandri*, p. 258.

<sup>2</sup> *Gallienus*, iv and v.

<sup>3</sup> *Hist. Eccles.* ix. 8.



## CHAPTER V

UNTIL recent years it was generally believed that no certain record of bubonic plague existed prior to that of Procopius (c. A.D. 490-560). It would seem to be necessary to revise this opinion in the face of a fragment of the writings of Rufus of Ephesus, preserved by Oribasius,<sup>1</sup> the Christian physician of the Emperor Julian (A.D. 355-63). He writes: 'The buboes called pestilential are most fatal and acute, especially those that are seen occurring about Libya, Egypt, and Syria, and which are mentioned by Dionysius Curtus. Dioscorides and Posidonius make much mention of them in the plague, which occurred in their time in Libya: they say it was accompanied by acute fever, pain, and prostration of the whole body, delirium, and *the appearance of large and hard buboes*, which did not suppurate, not only in the accustomed parts, but also in the groins and armpits:' and further: 'One can foresee an approaching plague by paying attention to the ill condition of the seasons, to the mode of living less conducive to health, and to the death of animals that precedes its invasion.'

Rufus is believed to have flourished in the reign of Trajan (A.D. 98-117), and may have been his physician. Dioscorides and Posidonius were probably Alexandrine physicians who flourished soon after the Christian era. The identity of Dionysius Curtus is conjectural, but there is some reason to think that he practised medicine in Alexandria in the third century B.C. Accepting these dates, one must admit that the evidence for the existence of bubonic plague in epidemic form in northern Africa and the Levant as early as the

<sup>1</sup> *Œuvres de Oribase, Bussemaker et Daremberg*, lib. 44. c. 17.

third century B.C. is exceedingly strong. Even if we conceive buboes to have been more common than nowadays in the course of other acute infectious diseases, the above record can hardly denote anything but bubonic plague. The reference to buboes as occurring with greater frequency in other parts than the groins and armpits does not appear to have received from medical writers the attention it deserves.

We have already adduced evidence to show that Hippocrates also was familiar with bubonic plague in its sporadic, but probably not in its epidemic form. Galen,<sup>1</sup> too, discusses the relation of buboes to fever in such a manner as to show that he also was acquainted with a severe bubonic malady, distinct from ordinary septic buboes. Oribasius also is cognizant of bubonic fevers, but it may be asserted generally that neither Galen nor Oribasius shows any signs of knowing them as a prevalent epidemic pestilence. We may, then, justly say that the narrative of Procopius affords the first unequivocal description of an epidemic of bubonic plague.

According to Procopius<sup>2</sup> the plague began at the ill-starred Pelusium, spreading in one direction through Alexandria and Egypt, in another through Palestine, and thence throughout the world, which would have meant to him from the eastern limits of Persia as far westward as the shores of the Atlantic. In the light of modern knowledge it is probable that Pelusium was no more than a distributing centre *en route*, and that the true focus of origin lay much further back along the commercial highways to the east or south. Of its pandemic character, however, we have the fullest confirmation in a succession of historical records. Evagrius<sup>3</sup> says that its total duration was fifty-two years, and this also it is possible to substantiate from the annexed

<sup>1</sup> *De Differ. Febr.* i, tom. vii, p. 2 ; 96, ed. Kuhn.

<sup>2</sup> *De Bello Persico*, ii. 22-3.

<sup>3</sup> *Hist.* iv. 28.



table of its offsets, along with the names of the authorities for each locality.

| <i>Date.</i> | <i>Locality.</i> | <i>Authority.</i> |
|--------------|------------------|-------------------|
| A.D. 540     | Antioch          | Evagrius.         |
| A.D. 542     | Byzantium        | Procopius.        |
| A.D. 549     | Arles            | Gregory of Tours. |
| A.D. 558     | Byzantium        | Agathias.         |
| A.D. 565     | Liguria          | Paul the Deacon.  |
| A.D. 567     | Auvergne         | Gregory of Tours. |
|              | Narbonne         | Gregory of Tours. |
| A.D. 587     | Marseilles       | Gregory of Tours. |
| A.D. 590     | Rome             | Gregory of Tours. |
|              |                  | Paul the Deacon.  |
|              |                  | John the Deacon.  |
| A.D. 590     | Avignon          | Gregory of Tours. |
| A.D. 591     | Strasbourg       | Oseas Schadaeus.  |

Procopius describes the plague as progressing by definite stages, expending its virulence on one country before passing to another, as though intent on overlooking nothing. Indeed, if at first it touched a place lightly, it always returned to it subsequently, till the full measure of punishment was exacted. Always beginning at the sea-coast it spread into the interior, so that the infection in the first place was clearly sea-borne. He states that it took over a year to reach Byzantium, where it made its appearance in the spring of A. D. 542. We know, however, from Evagrius that plague was already in Antioch in A. D. 540, earlier, therefore, than the date of its alleged appearance in Pelusium.

In his discussion of etiology Procopius borrows much of the phraseology of Thucydides, but neither here nor elsewhere does he show the least sign of being influenced by the substance of the Thucydidean narrative. Thucydides, it will be remembered, evidently attributed the plague of Athens to natural causes, declining to speculate as to what could have produced such a disturbance of nature (*μεταβολή*).

Procopius says that those who pretended to knowledge ascribed the pestilence to things darting down from heaven

(τοῖς ἐξ οὐρανοῦ ἐπισκήπτουσιν). This is indeed harking back to primitive conceptions. But he adds that they do so without a fragment of evidence, merely for the sake of deceiving, ascribing to nature what is clearly the handiwork of God and nothing else. This opinion he bases on the ground that the plague did not confine its ravages to any single country nor fall specially on either sex or any age, but spread over the whole world, regardless of season and of differences of habit. The argument, in so far as it was negative, was certainly a strong one in the light of the medical knowledge of his time, which referred much of the distinction of different maladies to variations of climate, soil, season, habit, and other accidental circumstances. Visual and auditory hallucinations were not lacking. Procopius says that many that were stricken by the plague saw, either when awake or when asleep, visions of spirits arrayed in human forms. Some seemed to hear in their sleep a voice saying that they were enrolled in the number of the dead. They fancied that these spectres in human form struck them in some part of the body, and immediately they were seized with the disease. To avoid these demons some shut themselves up in their houses and would not come out on any account. Others tried to escape the demons by invoking that the most sacred names and by every form of expiation.

This idea of pestilential demons seems to be of oriental origin. We have already encountered it in the story of Apollonius of Tyana at Ephesus. It figures in early Indian medicine, and also in Mahometan lore. Mahomet seems to have adopted it directly from Magian tradition, as embodied by Zoroaster in the *Zendavesta*. The Magians conceived one supreme God and Creator of the universe, from whom also emanated two active principles, personified as Ormusd, the principle or angel of light or good, and Ahriman, the principle or angel of darkness or evil, a demon. From these two opposite principles the universe was compounded, and



in the direction of its affairs these two conflicting elements were always striving for mastery. So long as the angel of light was in the ascendant it was well with the affairs of men; but if for a while the demon of darkness prevailed, then sorrow and suffering and sin were the lot of mortal man. It was inevitable that a shepherd race, tending their flocks beneath a star-lit sky in the plains of Arabia and the uplands of Central Asia should see in the light and the darkness two hostile personalities dominating their existence for better or for worse.

Mahometans believed that spirits were sent by God armed with bows and arrows to disseminate plague as a punishment for sin. Spectres of a black colour dealt fatal wounds, but those dealt by white spectres were not fatal. We shall presently find this same fancy figuring in the literature and art of mediaeval Italy. It is not without interest to have traced the conception spreading, like the plague itself, from an endemic focus in the East, first to Byzantium, and then by slow stages to Italy and the West.

In Byzantium many succumbed to the disease without any premonitory visions. In these there was a sudden onset of a mild fever without any grave symptoms, so that the victim had no apprehension of dying. Then either the same day, or a day or two after, appeared a bubo (*βουβών*), either in the groin or armpit, or behind the ear, or elsewhere. So far as these symptoms went, all suffered in pretty much the same way. The Byzantine plague was therefore characteristically bubonic, and the buboes seem to have been distributed in the different parts of the body, much as we find them to-day. In this and in all essential points bubonic plague still exhibits a striking conformity to the picture drawn by Procopius some 1,400 years ago. Indeed Procopius has afforded an admirable outline sketch of oriental plague, to which the most recent medical science has added little beyond some elaboration of detail. We can decipher

in his narrative at least four recognized types—the bubonic, the pustular, the pneumonic, and the tonsillar—as having prevailed during this epidemic in Byzantium. Unlike Thucydides, Procopius rejects the idea of contagion, as opposed to his own observations. Physicians, nurses, and those who buried the dead were not, in his experience, specially affected, in spite of their constant contact with the sick; and contrariwise, many contracted the disease without any contact at all. The belief of Procopius in the pestilence as a special act of God almost necessitated his being a non-contagionist. He was at a loss whether to attribute the varied manifestations of the disease to differences of constitution, or to the will of the Author of the plague. In one case profound lethargy prevailed, in another maniacal delirium. The lethargic lay simply regardless of everything and died of starvation, unless food was pressed on them. The delirious in their terror tried to flee: they struggled with their attendants in the attempt to throw themselves out of windows, or to drown themselves. Their desire was not to assuage their thirst, for often they threw themselves into the sea. This is evidently a criticism of the suggestion of Thucydides that it was thirst that drove the victims to throw themselves into cisterns.

Procopius says that the physicians conceived that the source of the disease lay in the buboes. This was a not unnatural inference from the fact that, in cases of simple suppuration of the bubo, the sufferer usually recovered, as though some virulent humour had escaped by this channel. For the same reason in later years incision was performed, and suppuration encouraged, whenever practicable. When, however, the physicians opened the buboes in the hope of discovering the cause, they found nothing but a horrible growth, like a carbuncle (*ἀνθραξ*). The Byzantine physicians evidently regarded the disease as a morbid process within the confines of recognized pathology.



There was a pustular type of the disease, and those who got a crop of black pustules all over the body, as large as a lentil, died at once. Procopius in his *φλυκταίναις μελαίναις*, ὅσον φακοῦ μέγεθος, ἐξήνθει τὸ σῶμα echoes the language of Thucydides, *φλυκταίναις μικραῖς καὶ ἔλκεσιν ἐξηνθηκός*: and it is noteworthy that ulcers were no feature of the Byzantine plague.

Many dropped dead from spontaneous vomiting of blood, probably from the lungs, as is not infrequent in the pneumonic form of plague.

Some escaped with a defect in the speech, so that as long as they lived they stammered or stuttered, and were unintelligible. This may well have been a sequel of the tonsillar type.

The plague lasted in epidemic virulence in Byzantium for four months in all, and was at its height for three. This again, speaking broadly, has been a feature of most European and Levantine outbreaks. At the worst the daily mortality reached the appalling total of ten thousand.

Procopius dwells at length on the accumulation of dead bodies in the streets and the neglect of funeral rites. At first each man buried the dead members of his own household, sometimes throwing them into graves prepared for others; but soon buriers failed, and then corpses began to litter the streets. These Justinian commissioned his agent Theodorus to bury. When all the existing burial-grounds were filled, huge burial-pits were dug wherever they could find space all round the city. Finally, when the digging of graves could no longer keep pace with the deaths, they mounted the towers of the city walls in Sycae, the port of Byzantium, and removing the roofs threw in the bodies promiscuously: when these were filled, the roofs were replaced. But when the wind set from that quarter, the awful stench proved most distressing to the citizens. Many corpses were simply cast out on the shore, where they were piled in barges and

turned adrift out to sea. We shall see these various conditions strikingly reproduced during the plague of Marseilles in A.D. 1721. John of Ephesus states that the ambulance arrangements made by Justinian for the burial of the dead met all the requirements, but it is impossible to accept his statement in face of the precise and detailed account of Procopius.

The horrors of the plague, according to Procopius, turned men from dissoluteness to piety, for fear that their own death was imminent. If, however, they fell sick and recovered, they became even more dissolute than before, in the belief that they were now safe for the future. According to Thucydides, the Athenian Greeks became reckless from the first and gave themselves over to pleasure, seeing that the disease smote virtuous and vicious alike. Perhaps, however, the difference lay more in the mental attitude of the observer than in the actual demeanour of those observed.

All work came to a standstill in Byzantium, so that famine supervened in the city, where usually everything was in profusion. Justinian himself became infected and suffered from an attack, in which a bubo appeared.

Such in brief is the account that Procopius gives of the plague of Byzantium, as he saw it with his own eyes. Unquestionably he had before him the description of the plague of Athens, for now and again he slips into an identical turn of language. But to speak of him as a flagrant plagiarist of Thucydides is sheer absurdity. Rather he gives the impression of maintaining a critical attitude towards Thucydides, and of emphasizing the points of dissent. Procopius has no doubt that he is describing the same disease as Thucydides, and is impressed by the clinical differences he has observed. The tone of Thucydides is subjective: he attempts a general description, but cannot keep in the background the symptoms of his own case. The tone of Procopius is wholly objective: he writes as an intensely interested



onlooker, retailing his own observations, supplemented by the statements of those who have had the disease and recovered. The apparent resemblance of the two accounts is really no more than surface deep.

An account of an offset of this pandemic at Antioch survives from the pen of the historian Evagrius,<sup>1</sup> who was born in A.D. 536 and spent the greater part of his life at Antioch. Apparently he knew nothing of the records of Procopius or Agathias, for he says that the history of this pestilence had not been written previously. He knew the narrative of the plague of Athens, for he says that this plague was 'in some respects much like that which Thucydides described, in others quite unlike': it cannot be said to have influenced either the form or the substance of his description. He says that it first reached Antioch in 540 B.C., whereas it did not appear at Byzantium till the spring of 542 B.C., and that the pandemic lasted altogether fifty-two years, exceeding 'all the diseases that had ever been before Philostratus wondered at the plague, which was in his time, because it continued fifteen years'. This is presumed to have been the Antonine pestilence, for Philostratus was born in Lemnos about A.D. 170, but spent most of his life in Rome and died there in A.D. 245. Evagrius had the fullest opportunities of observing the plague at close quarters, for as a boy at school he himself suffered from an inguinal bubo, and in later years he lost his wife and several children of plague. He was but three years old when it first reached Antioch, so that his description must represent the disease after it had been rife for many years. Evagrius traces its origin further back than does Procopius, placing it in Ethiopia, so that it may actually have originated in an endemic area in Central Africa. Spreading over the whole world, it attacked cities quite irrespective of season, summer and winter alike. Evagrius has no doubt whatever of the contagiousness of the distemper. Those, he says, who

<sup>1</sup> *Hist.* iv. 28.

escaped one year were attacked the next, and those who fled to places free from disease were the first to succumb, as they carried the contagion with them. Infection seemed to be taken in various ways—by sharing beds, by actual contact, by visiting infected houses, or even by casual meeting in the market-place. Some, however, escaped in spite of running every risk of infection.

The description that Evagrius gives of the symptoms of the disease, though brief, is wonderfully comprehensive. It shows that he was cognizant of the tonsillar, the bubonic, and the carbuncular or pustular types at least, and the rapidity of a fatal issue in a proportion of the cases suggests that pneumonic and septicaemic forms were also rife. 'The disease', he writes, 'was compound and mixt with many other maladies. It took some men first in the head, made their eyes as red as blood and puffed up their cheeks: afterwards it fell at their throat, and whomsoever it took it dispatched him out of the way. It began with some with a fire and voiding of all that was within them, in others with swellings about the secret parts of the body, and there arose burning fires, so that they died thereof within two or three days of the furthest in such sort and of so perfect a remembrance as if they had not been sick at all; others died mad, and carbuncles that arose out of the flesh killed many.'

Agathias<sup>1</sup> (b. A.D. 536) describes a recrudescence of this pandemic in Byzantium in A.D. 558. He carried on the history of Procopius from its termination to A.D. 558. He says that the disease had never really disappeared since the first outbreak in A.D. 542, when it burst out furiously a second time in the spring of this year. Many persons fell as though stricken with apoplexy: those who held out longest died on the fifth day. Buboes and continuous fever were the outstanding features, as in the previous visitation. 'People of all ages perished indiscriminately,

<sup>1</sup> *Hist.* v. 12.



but especially the young and vigorous and those in the flower of youth: and of them the males, for the females were not so much affected. With an epidemic recurrence such as this, the chief incidence would necessarily be on the young, who had neither resisted, nor acquired immunity from, a previous attack. The character of their occupation or of their habits of life would doubtless explain the special liability of the males to infection.

Gregory of Tours<sup>1</sup> (A.D. 540-94) testifies to the widespread character of the plague in France. In A.D. 549 he says that it depopulated the province of Arles, and afterwards devastated Narbonne. Here Felix, bishop of Nantes,<sup>2</sup> succumbed to the sloughing of his legs caused by the application of cantharides plasters to a crop of pustules.

In A.D. 566, before the plague invaded the Auvergne,<sup>3</sup> a succession of portents terrified the district. Three or four great brilliant lights made their appearance around the sun, which nevertheless underwent almost complete eclipse in October, looking dark and discoloured and like a bag. The heaven also seemed to be on fire, and many strange signs were seen. Then in A.D. 567 the epidemic raged throughout the district, causing an immense mortality. Lyons, Bourges, Chalons, and Dijon also lost a large part of their population. Coffins for the dead soon failed, and as many as ten bodies would be placed in the same grave. One Sunday no less than three hundred corpses were counted in the church of St. Peter at Clermont. Death seized the victims with dramatic suddenness. 'There grew in the groin or armpit a lesion in the shape of a serpent, the effect of which was such that men yielded up their souls on the second or third day, and its violence completely took away their senses.'

In this epidemic buboes were evidently most frequently found in the groins, for Gregory repeatedly speaks of the

<sup>1</sup> *Hist. Francorum*, iv. 5.

<sup>2</sup> vi. 14.

<sup>3</sup> iv. 31.

disease as *lues inguinaria* or *morbis inguinalis* and the like.

Plague broke out at Marseilles<sup>1</sup> in A.D. 587, brought there by a merchant ship from Spain, which concealed its contact with a plague-stricken port. Several people made purchases from it, and in consequence eight inhabitants of one house were fatally infected. As in the epidemic of A.D. 1720, the disease did not spread immediately to the whole town. Bishop Theodore and a few of his suite shut themselves up in the church of St. Victor, and there; amid the general desolation, implored the mercy of God with prayer and vigil till the epidemic was at an end. On the return of the fugitive populace a belated outbreak exacted its appointed tribute.

Around Avignon<sup>2</sup> celestial portents foretold the plague that broke out in A.D. 590. The earth was illuminated at night by a light as bright as the midday. Balls of fire were seen tracking the sky during the night. A violent earthquake was felt at dawn in mid-June. The sun suffered almost complete eclipse in mid-August. Abundant autumn thunderstorms and rain raised the rivers in flood.

Meantime Italy, too, had been in like case. Paul the Deacon<sup>3</sup> (A.D. 720-90) briefly refers to a plague that had devastated Liguria in A.D. 565. He says that the plague was presaged by the sudden appearance of marks on houses, doors, utensils, and clothing, and the more they tried to efface them the more conspicuous they became. Eusebius<sup>4</sup> in like manner told of moulds on the walls of houses in a previous pestilence, and in Leviticus<sup>5</sup> we read of greenish and reddish marks on houses infected with leprosy. Towards the end of the year buboes began to attack the people, followed by a fever that killed in three days. The inhabitants

<sup>1</sup> *Hist. Francorum*, x. 1.

<sup>2</sup> x. 23.

<sup>3</sup> *De Gestis Langobardorum*, ii. 4.

<sup>4</sup> *Hist. Eccles.* vii. 22.

<sup>5</sup> xiv. 37.



fled, leaving property and cattle and crops, and desolation reigned supreme.

But it was on the head of hapless Rome that the full fury of the expiring storm was destined to spend its virulence. Both Gregory of Tours<sup>1</sup> and Paul the Deacon have left a record of the havoc. Gregory says that he obtained his information from his own deacon, who happened to be in Rome at the time. Paul the Deacon<sup>2</sup> seems to borrow his material from Gregory of Tours. An inundation of the Tiber in A.D. 589 resulted in the destruction of many old buildings on its banks and in the flooding of the granaries of the church, so that immense stores of grain were spoilt. The river yielded up a multitude of serpents, and a dragon of extraordinary size was seen to float through the city on its passage to the sea. Probably these were eels from the muddy bed of the Tiber, metamorphosed after the manner of Ovid into serpents: the dragon no one seems to have seen at close quarters. The inundation was followed in A.D. 590 by a severe outburst of bubonic plague (*pestilentia, quam inguinariam vocant*).

Portents were not confined to Rome. According to Evagrius,<sup>3</sup> a great earthquake in A.D. 589 laid Antioch in ruins, destroying the sanctuary of the Mother of God, and taking sixty thousand lives. In Upper Italy also there were extensive inundations due to overflowing of the mountain streams in Venetia, Liguria, and the sub-Alpine plains.

It is instructive to contrast the records of these chroniclers of the Church of the West with those of Procopius and Evagrius, and still more so with that of the pagan historian Thucydides. So intent are they on the mental and moral features of the distemper, that they say almost nothing of its physical features. They dilate at length on the visions

<sup>1</sup> *Hist. Francorum*, x. i.

<sup>2</sup> *De Gestis Langobardorum*, iii. 24.

<sup>3</sup> *Hist.* vi.

and hallucinations that haunted the distracted fancy of the sufferers, which Thucydides disregards, though such must have accompanied the wild delirium he describes. Demons stalking the streets, ineffaceable marks and moulds on houses, voices from the grave, and celestial portents were the creations of the delirious fancy, and are faithfully reproduced in the pages of the Christian writers. One is sensible of something of the spirit in which Fra Angelico portrayed the joys of heaven and the torments of hell, when pestilence lay heavy on mediaeval Italy. The mortality in Rome was appalling. Death was rampant everywhere. At first the dead bodies were gathered up and flung in loads into great gaping graves, but after a while none were left even to bury the dead, and putrid corpses littered the streets. All business was at a standstill, and such as survived were huddled, panic-stricken like sheep, in the insecure sanctuary of the churches. To add to the general consternation, Pope Pelagius perished on February 8, A.D. 590. The choice of a successor lay with the clergy and people of Rome, subject to confirmation by the Emperor. With one accord they haled Abbot Gregory from the seclusion of his monastery to the pontifical chair in anticipation of the Imperial assent. Gregory of Tours, Paul the Deacon, and John the Deacon all tell of Gregory's unwillingness to obey the summons, and of his attempt to intercept the letter of election on its way to the Emperor in Constantinople. But meantime, as the plague showed no sign of abating, Gregory determined to try to appease the wrath of God by a special act of contrition. Ascending the pulpit of St. John Lateran, he preached a memorable sermon, which has been preserved by the hand of Gregory of Tours. He implored them to make their sufferings an instrument for their conversion, and a means by which to soften the hardness of their hearts. He besought them, as Cyprian had done before, as Borromeo and Belsunce were to do hereafter, not to let the suddenness



with which death seized them, sweeping away numbers at a time, and giving no opportunity for tears of penitence, find them unprepared to meet their God. Let them call their sins to mind and purge them away with weeping, for God wills not the death of a sinner, but rather that he may turn from his wickedness and live. Let no man despair because of the multitude of his offences. Did not God forgive the people of Nineveh of old, when they did penance for three days, and did He not give the reward of everlasting life to the dying thief? Let them therefore turn with him to God with importunity of prayer, or ever the sword of punishment descend. Does He not say by the mouth of the Psalmist : call upon Me in the time of trouble : so will I hear thee and thou shalt praise Me. Let them all come with contrite hearts and mended moods at early dawn on the fourth day from then to the celebration of a sevenfold litany, and with lamentation in their souls, so that the stern Judge may remit the sentence of damnation He has purposed to pass upon them. Let the clergy then start from the church of the martyr-saints Cosmo and Damian, along with the priests of the sixth region. All the abbots with their monks from the church of the martyrs Gervase and Protasius, along with the priests of the fourth region. All the abbesses with their flocks from the church of the martyr-saints Marcellinus and Peter, along with the priests of the first region. All the children from the church of the martyr-saints John and Paul, along with the priests of the second region. All the laity from the church of the protomartyr-saint Stephen, along with the priests of the seventh region. All the widowed women from the church of St. Euphemia, along with the priests of the fifth region. And the married women from the church of the martyr-saint Clement, along with the priests of the third region. Let them all go forth from these several churches with prayer and lamentation, to meet at the basilica of the Blessed Virgin Mary the Mother of Christ,

there with long and earnest supplication to implore pardon for their sins.

So Gregory distributed the remnant that the plague had spared according to the seven ecclesiastical regions of Rome, bidding his clergy spend the three days' interval in ceaseless psalms and prayers for mercy. Then on the fourth day, the festival of St. Mark, in the pale light of the early April morning, the great procession set out. With solemn chant of doleful *Miserere*, these seven trains of human suffering wended their slow way sadly amid the ruined monuments of ancient Rome. No other sound broke the stillness, but the faint rustle of sweeping garments and the silent shuffle of sick men's feet. Now and again one fell stricken and lay as he fell, for Death was moving hither and thither among the moving ranks.<sup>1</sup> No less than eighty breathed out their lives before the church of the Mother of God was reached. There again Gregory fervently exhorted the people to repentance, so that the plague might cease.

A legend has it that as Gregory, heading his train of penitents, reached the Aelian Bridge, there, right before him, on the summit of Hadrian's mole, a heavenly vision met his eyes. There stood the Archangel Michael, restoring a flaming sword to its sheath, in token that the plague was stayed. It is to this legend that the mausoleum owes the name of Castel S. Angelo, that it has borne since the tenth century at least. A bronze figure of the Archangel sheathing his sword still hovers on the summit, fifth of a series that have stood there at different times.

The legend of the angel is not mentioned by either of Gregory's biographers, the deacons Paul and John, or by Bede or Gregory of Tours. Though of earlier origin than the tenth century, the first written records of it are in a German sermon of the twelfth or thirteenth century and

<sup>1</sup> This penitential procession has been wonderfully depicted by Dudden in his *Gregory the Great*, vol. i, p. 217.



in the *Legenda Aurea* of the end of the thirteenth century Caxton has rendered it thus :

‘ And because the mortality ceased not, he ordained a procession, in which he did do bear an image of our Lady, which, as is said, St. Luke the Evangelist made, which was a good painter, he had carved it and painted it after the likeness of the glorious Virgin Mary. And anon the mortality ceased, and the air became pure and clear, and about the image was heard a voice of angels that sung this Anthem :

Regina Coeli laetare ! Alleluia.

Quia quem meruisti portare : Alleluia.

Resurrexit sicut dixit : Alleluia.

and St. Gregory put thereto

Ora pro nobis, deum rogamus : Alleluia.

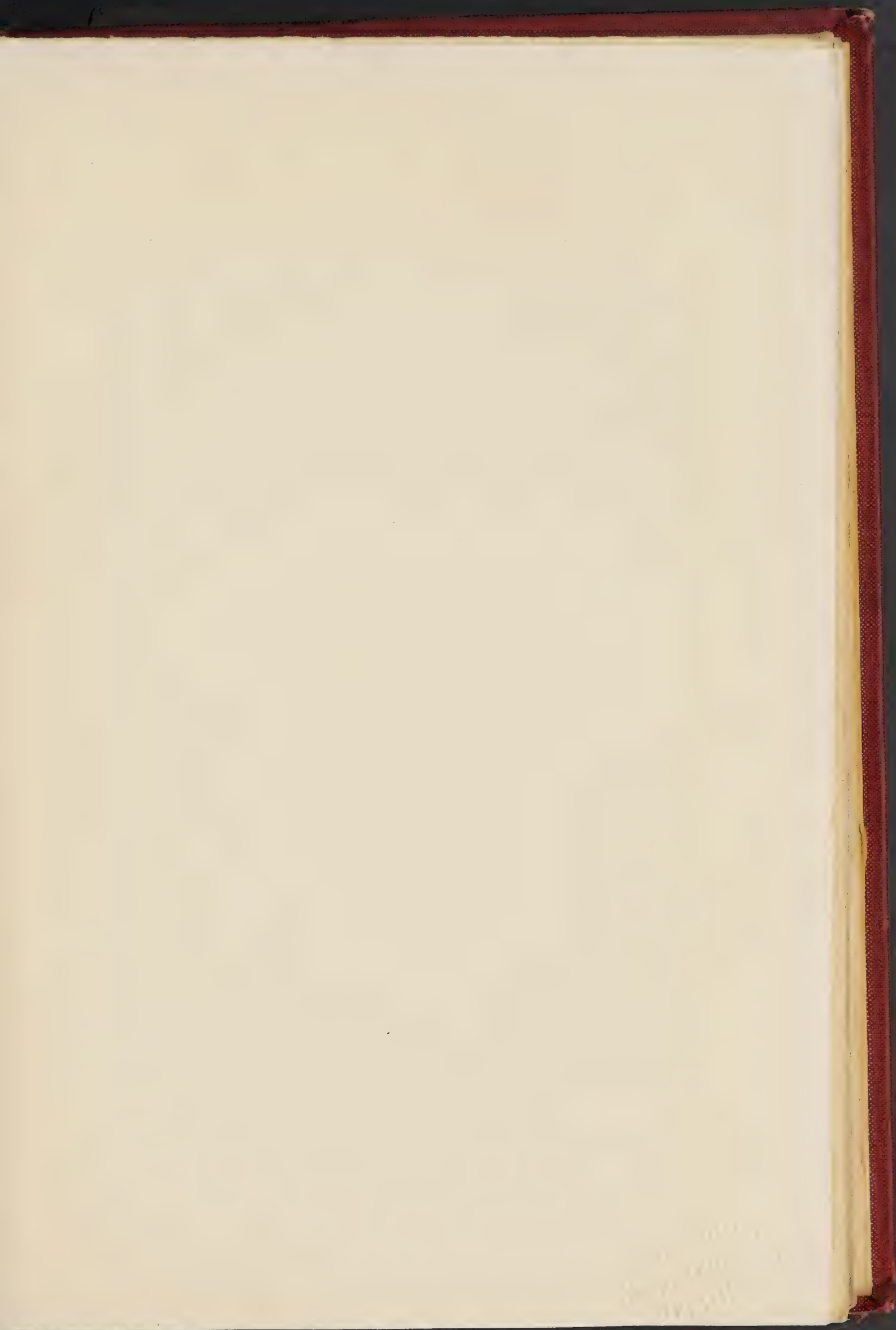
At the same time St. Gregory saw an angel upon a castle, which made clean a sword all bloody, and put it into the sheath, and thereby St. Gregory understood that the pestilence of this mortality was passed, and after that it was called the Castle Angel.’

In memory of this legend the great processions from S. Marco, until the prohibition of processions in A.D. 1870, used to strike up the antiphon ‘ Regina Coeli ’, as soon as they came to the bridge of Hadrian.

For the true source of this legend there is no need to look beyond the vision of the angel at the threshing-floor of Araunah : ‘ And David lifted up his eyes, and saw the angel of the Lord stand between the earth and the heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem.’ In the Capitoline Museum is an altar dedicated to Isis by some traveller on his safe return, and bearing the customary imprint of two feet. The devout believed these to be the footprints of the angel that appeared to Gregory, and the altar once stood in the church of Ara Coeli.

It is certain that at least as early as this time pictures were carried in public procession. Theophylactus<sup>1</sup> has

<sup>1</sup> *Hist.* ii. 3, and iii. 1.







GREGORY AND THE ANGEL

Photograph by Giraudon, Paris



described two occasions on which a sacred effigy of Christ, believed not to have been made by human hands, was carried into battle for the sake of inspiring valour and discipline into the soldiery (A.D. 586 and 588). Among the many gems in which Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*<sup>1</sup> abounds is that picture of the arrival of Augustine and his companions in Thanet 'bearing a silver cross for their banner, and the image of our Lord and Saviour painted on a board' (A.D. 597). The sixteenth-century chronicler Baronius says, that the picture which Gregory carried in this plague procession of A.D. 590 was that of the Madonna, now preserved in the church of S. Maria Maggiore on the Esquiline, and still believed to protect Rome from plague and pestilence. Rome has no fewer than four pictures of the Madonna attributed like this one to the hand of Luke the Physician, and all of them reputed to have wonder-working powers. Expert opinion, alas! pronounces the oldest of them a fifteenth-century production.

Gregory's procession has afforded a favourite theme for art. It is the subject of one of the frescoes in the Lady Chapel of Winchester Cathedral executed under the direction of Prior Silkstede at the beginning of the sixteenth century. The scene is also shown in a picture in the Chiesa del San Pietro at Perugia, in a modern picture by the Austrian painter Hiremy Hirsch, and in several others elsewhere. The miniature figured on the opposite page is one of two from a beautiful *Livre d'Heures*, of the early fifteenth century, and once the property of the Duc de Berry. It is now in the Musée Condé of the Château de Chantilly.

An Italian tradition refers the custom of saying 'Bless you', when a person sneezes, to the time of the pestilence of Gregory, in which all those that sneezed were said to have died. Boersch, quoting from the local chronicles of Kleinlaue and of Oseas Schadaeus, would trace its origin to the plague

<sup>1</sup> Bk. I, c. 25.



at Strasbourg in A.D. 591.<sup>1</sup> 'And when any one sneezed, he gave up the ghost forthwith. Hence the saying "God help you". And when any one yawned, he died. Hence it comes that when any one yawns, one makes the sign of the cross before the mouth.' Probably the association is even older than this, for Thucydides speaks of sneezing in the plague of Athens. Sneezing and yawning were prominent features of the Sweating Sickness.

<sup>1</sup> *Essai sur la mortalité à Strasbourg*, p. 79.







FRESCO IN S. PIETRO IN VINCOLI, ROME  
Photograph by Anderson, Rome



## CHAPTER VI

IN the summer of A.D. 680 Rome was again gripped in the toils of an appalling plague that had spread over the greater part of Italy. Paul the Deacon<sup>1</sup> says that eclipses of both sun and moon in May were followed by pestilence in the months of July, August, and September. Describing its ravages at Ticinum (Pavia) Paul says that 'the number of the dead was so great that parents were often carried to burial on the same biers as their children, and brothers along with sisters. . . . And then many saw with their own eyes a good and a bad angel passing through the city by night. And whenever at the bidding of the good angel, the bad one, who seemed to carry a lance in his hand, struck so many times with his lance on the door of each house, as many of that household would die on the following day. Then it was revealed to some one that the plague would not cease until an altar was set up to Sebastian, saint and martyr, at the church of S. Pietro in Vincoli. This was done, and as soon as the altar was set up, the relics of the martyr-saint Sebastian were brought from Rome, and forthwith the plague ceased.'

Paul the Deacon, beyond all doubt, was referring to the church of S. Pietro in Vincoli at Pavia, but the Romans of later date claimed the legend for their own church of the same name, in which it has been embodied in a fresco of the fifteenth century, ascribed to Pollajuolo (1429-98). In the background, at the summit of a flight of stairs, presumably suggested by those of Ara Coeli, a citizen is telling to Pope Agatho, who is seated among his cardinals, his dream that the pestilence will not cease till the body of

<sup>1</sup> *De Gestis Langobardorum*, vi. 5.



S. Sebastian is brought into the city. On the right the good angel indicates the condemned houses to the bad angel in the guise of the Evil One, who strikes on the door with his lance. On the left a procession, carrying a banner on which the Madonna is depicted with robe spread out in protecting attitude, is bringing in the relics. The foreground is strewn with corpses of the dead. In the sky, bow in hand, hovers the angel that spreads the pestilence. To the left is a group of the Almighty and angels, now almost obliterated.

It is not generally recognized that the well-known picture 'La Peste à Rome', by Delaunay (A.D. 1828-91), now in the Musée du Luxembourg at Paris, was directly inspired by this fresco. The scene is laid in a street of Rome, which is strewn with bodies of dead and dying, among which the good and evil angels are busy at their task. The figure of a youth huddled up in a brown shawl on a doorstep is a living picture of misery. In the background a procession bearing a cross is descending a flight of stairs, and a fire to purify the atmosphere is burning in the open street. An effigy of Aesculapius and a colossal equestrian statue of Constantine are introduced in the manner of the Renaissance. The chief merit of the picture lies in the excellence of its draughtsmanship.

In this same church at Rome is a mosaic effigy of Sebastian, believed to have been executed in A.D. 683. In spite, however, of the name of Sebastian, that it carries in gold mosaic letters, it is difficult to believe that it is anything but a figure of St. Peter, transformed perhaps in the presence of this epidemic to that of Sebastian. It represents faithfully the traditional lineaments of the apostle, an old man with white hair and beard, dressed in the true Byzantine style. Kugler considers that the careful shadowing of the drapery, executed with more than usual pains, indicates that the effigy was intended to be exposed to the close gaze of the pious. The figure on its blue mosaic background is stiff and inanimate, even beyond other similar archaic effigies. Beside

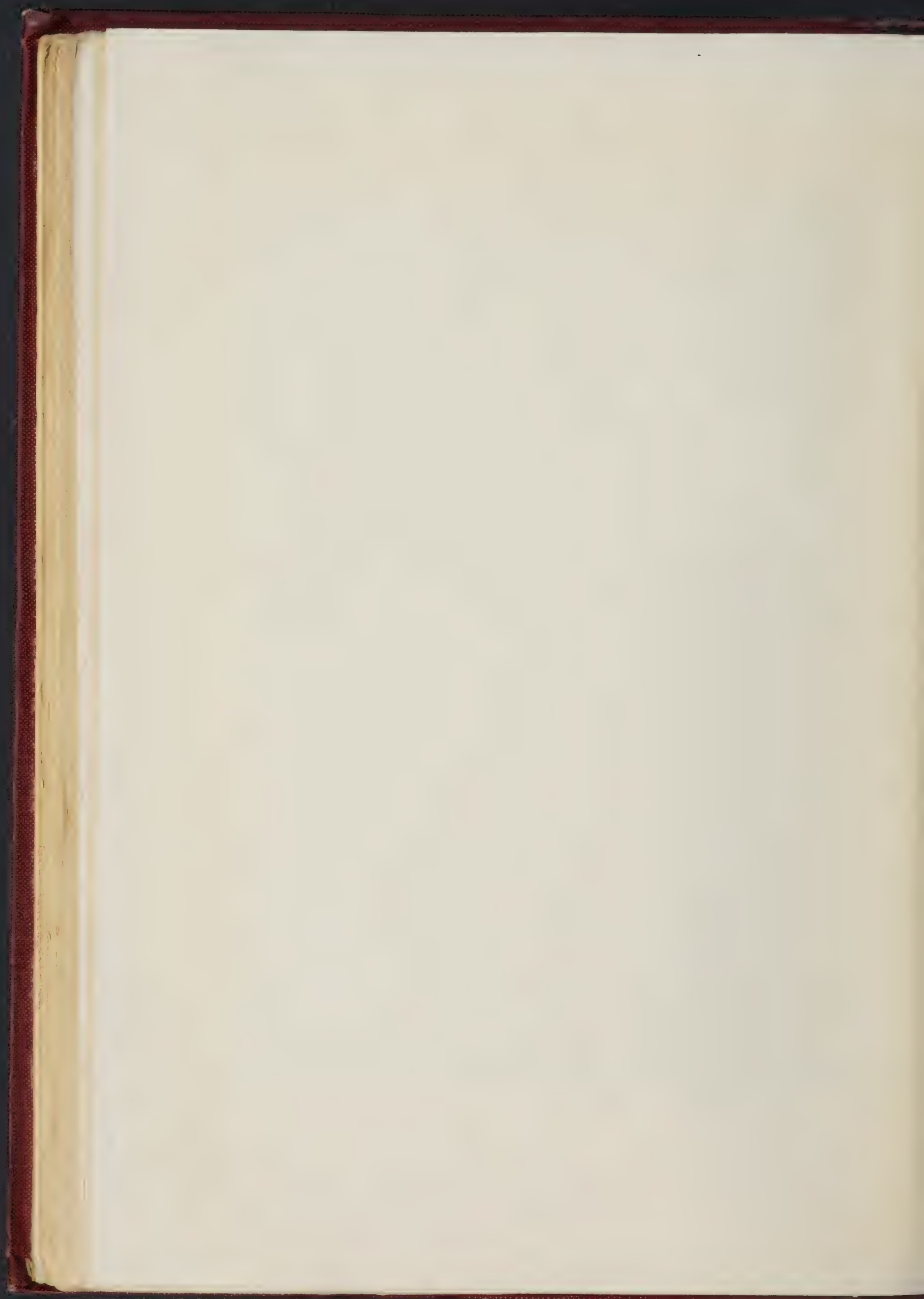




PLATE VI LA PESTE À ROME. BY DELAUNAY

Photograph by Giraudon, Paris (Face Page 96)





it, on a marble tablet, is an inscription in Latin, reproducing almost to a word the story told by Paul the Deacon. Tradition has it that Pope Agatho (A.D. 678-82) on this occasion caused the bones of the saint to be collected in the cemetery of Calixtus, and brought to the church of S. Pietro in Vincoli, there to be enshrined beneath an altar. In the ninth century the body seems to have been removed for safety to the Vatican, and again transferred to the church of S. Sebastiano, where it now is, by Honorius III in A.D. 1216. This church, however, was completely rebuilt in A.D. 1611.

From the time of this pestilence in A.D. 680, Sebastian was universally recognized as the patron saint of pestilence. Gradually he comes to be identified more particularly with true plague, but never in the same exclusive fashion as his brother saint, St. Roch. His comprehensive patronage of pestilence indicates not only how rife were other epidemic diseases besides true plague, but how little they were differentiated in the public mind.

The story of the life of Sebastian<sup>1</sup> is well authenticated in its main incidents. Born in the middle of the third century A.D., he was a native of Narbonne in Gaul. His noble birth secured for him early in life the command of a company of Praetorian Guards, so that he was constantly about the person of the Emperor. Though secretly a Christian and using his position to secure the conversion of others to Christianity, he remained intensely loyal to the temporal interest of the Emperor. Among his friends were two young soldiers, Marcus and Marcellinus, like him of noble birth. They were convicted of embracing Christianity, and after enduring torture bravely were led out to die. On the way their aged parents, their wives and children, and their friends, implored them to relent, and they were about to recant, when Sebastian rushed forward and exhorted them not to renounce their Redeemer. So inspiring was his

<sup>1</sup> Caxton, *Golden Legend*; Jameson, *Sacred and Legendary Art*.



appeal, that the whole assembly, guards, judges, and all, were converted and baptized, and for a while Marcus and Marcellinus were saved. This scene is depicted in a spirited canvas by Veronese in the plague church of S. Sebastiano at Venice. Their respite was but short, for in a few months they were put to death with many others of the Christian community, and Sebastian himself was condemned to die. The Emperor Diocletian (A.D. 284-305), by reason of his personal attachment, sent for him and exhorted him to abjure his heresy, but Sebastian meekly and courageously refused. Diocletian then ordered that he should be bound to a stake and shot to death with arrows, and that an inscription should be placed on the stake for all to see, saying that he was put to death only for being a Christian. A vast number of pictures, beside the masterpiece of Sodoma,<sup>1</sup> depict this scene. Pierced with arrows, Sebastian was left for dead, but at midnight Irene, the widow of one of his martyred friends, came to take away his body for burial, but found him still alive, the arrows having pierced no vital part. She and her attendants carried him to her house and tended him, till he was completely healed. After this they urged him to leave Rome, but Sebastian went boldly to the palace gate, and as the Emperor passed out, pleaded for those Christians who were condemned to suffer for their faith, and reproached Diocletian for his cruelty. The Emperor in fierce anger ordered his guards to seize Sebastian and carry him to the circus, there to beat him to death with clubs. To conceal his dead body from his friends it was thrown into the Cloaca Maxima, but a Christian woman, Lucina, received tidings in a vision of where the body lay, and recovering it had it secretly buried in the catacombs. The church of S. Sebastiano at Rome is now built over these catacombs.

Though Sebastian was martyred in A.D. 288, it was not till

<sup>1</sup> See Frontispiece.







SEBASTIAN  
AS PROTECTOR AGAINST PESTILENCE  
By Benozzo Gozzoli. Photograph by Brogi, Florence



the plague of A.D. 683 that his cult as a protector from pestilence was firmly established.

The association of Sebastian with pestilence was in the first instance purely fortuitous. Devout men in seasons of pestilence were wont to acclaim their own peculiar patron saint a very present help in time of trouble: an altar, a church, a votive picture, a procession, these, now one, now another, were the price of the promised dispensation. But that Sebastian came to be the patron saint of plague and pestilence was due to the association of arrows with his effigy and with the story of his attempted martyrdom. From remote antiquity we have seen that arrows have been emblematic of plague. It was Apollo among the Greeks that scattered pestilence with his bow, and who was invoked also by sacrifice and hymns of praise to avert it. In Christian hagiology and Christian art Sebastian is the counterpart of the pagan Apollo. Whatever the variations of detail, Sebastian is practically always represented, either transfixed with arrows or carrying an arrow in his hand. Having regard to his story, it is a mistake to show the arrows piercing a vital part, such as the heart, the brain, or even the neck, as is often done. And for artistic effect it is well that they should not be so numerous as to suggest a well-filled pin-cushion: albeit the *Golden Legend* has it that 'the archers shot at him till he was as full of arrows as an urchin is full of pricks'.

Such is the effect of an interesting fresco by Benozzo Gozzoli (c. A.D. 1420-97) in the Chiesa della Collegiata at San Gimignano, dedicated to Sebastian in A.D. 1465 in a time of plague. At the head of the picture, Christ, with the marks of wounds in His hands, communes with the Virgin and a group of saints. Sebastian is standing on a pedestal, his whole body studded with arrows, while archers on either side of him are rapidly increasing the number. This Collegiata fresco has been closely followed



in an Italian *Pestblätter*, reproduced in the Heitz-Schreiber portfolio of *Pestblätter* (q.v.).

Another votive fresco in the church of S. Agostino at San Gimignano, also by Benozzo Gozzoli, commemorating the disastrous plague of A.D. 1464, shows Sebastian turning aside with his cloak the broken arrows of pestilence. In the uppermost part of the fresco the Almighty is launching forth His shafts, and attendant angels are aiding in the task. Between them and Sebastian Christ and the Virgin kneel in an attitude of prayer. Sebastian stands in the centre of the foreground on a low stone pedestal, on which are inscribed the words, 'Sancte Sebastiane, Intercede Pro Devoto Populo Tuo.' His body is fully draped, and the broken arrows lie behind him, removed by the hands of angels, two of whom hold a crown of martyrdom above his head.

These older representations of Sebastian by Benozzo Gozzoli, and others by Albrecht Dürer and the early German school, showing Sebastian as an elderly bearded man, offer but little attractiveness. By far the most beautiful pictures are those of Perugino, Sodoma, and Francia, who use his nude and youthful figure, as the Greeks used Apollo, as a model for the exhibition of elegance of form and accuracy of anatomical design. As one of the few nude forms permitted to Christian art, it is readily understood why Sebastian figures in such a multitude of pictures. The finest example of this type is the peerless masterpiece of Sodoma (1477-1549), now in the Uffizi Gallery at Florence, one of the most beautiful creations of Renaissance art. It was formerly a banner, painted in A.D. 1528 for the Sienese Compagnia di San Sebastiano in Camollia, and was carried in procession when Siena was afflicted with pestilence. It was kept in the church of the Confraternity at Siena, until it was removed to Florence in A.D. 1786. The undraped body of the saint is modelled on the lines of the youthful Apollo. He is bound to a tree in the foreground of a wild Italian landscape.



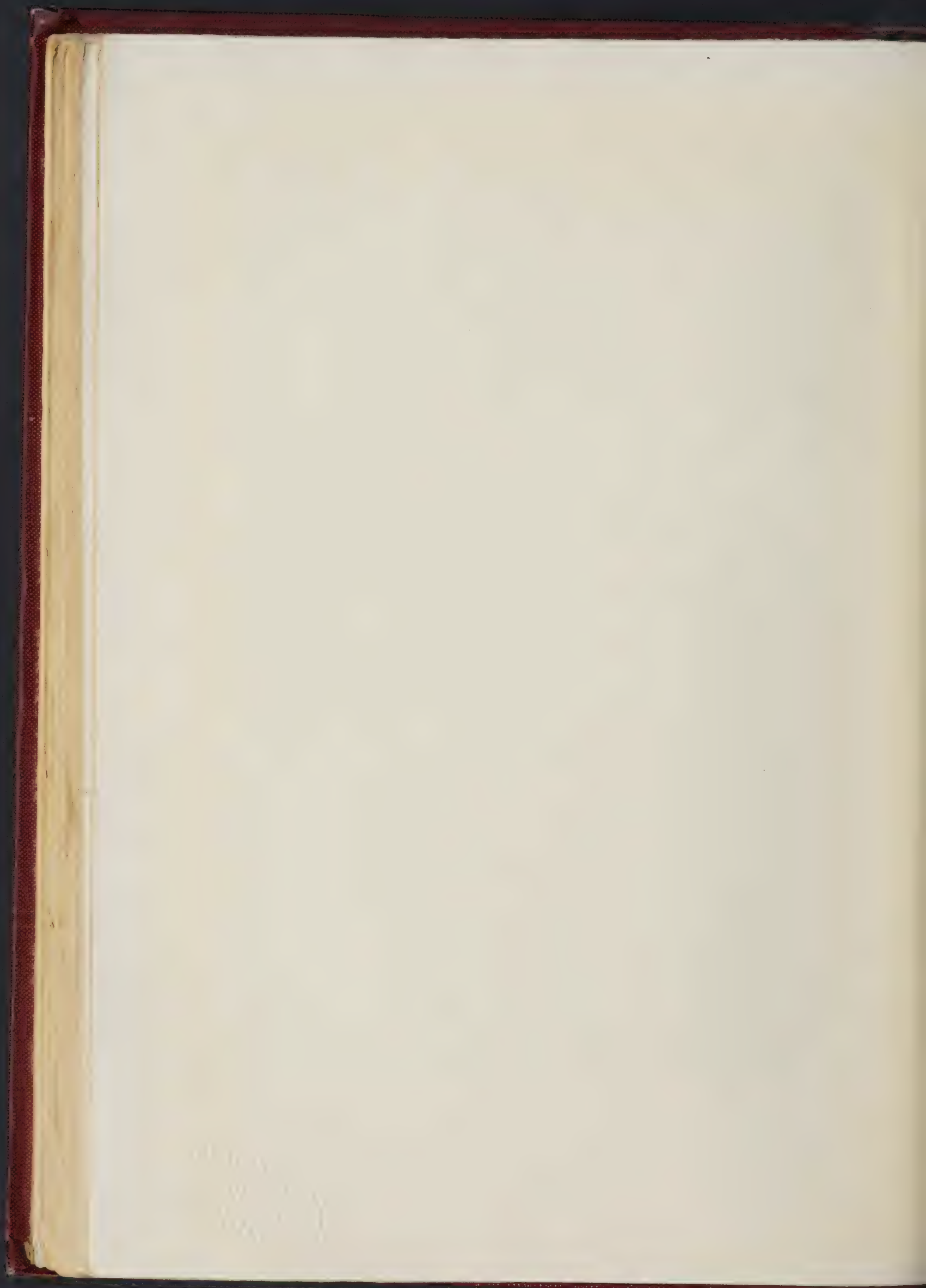


SODOMA'S SEBASTIAN PLAGUE BANNER (REVERSE)

SS. Roch and Sigismund, and Brethren of Compagnia di S. Sebastiano

Photograph by Alinari, Rome





His neck, side, and one thigh are transfixed with arrows. The upturned face wears an expression of ecstasy, in spite of suffering, as an angel descends to place the crown of martyrdom on his brow. Symonds has said of this picture :

‘ Gifted with an exquisite feeling for the beauty of the human body, Sodoma excelled himself when he was contented with a single figure. His St. Sebastian, notwithstanding its wan and faded colouring, is still the very best that has been painted. Suffering, refined and spiritual, without contortion or spasm, could not be presented with more pathos in a form of more surpassing loveliness. This is a truly demonic picture in the fascination it exercises and the memory it leaves upon the mind. Part of its unanalysable charm may be due to the bold thought of combining the beauty of a Greek Hylas with the Christian sentiment of martyrdom. Only the Renaissance could have produced a hybrid so successful, because so deeply felt.’

On the reverse of the banner is the Madonna with the Child in her arms, enthroned on clouds, above a kneeling group of SS. Roch and Sigismund and members of the *Compagnia di S. Sebastiano*, wearing their characteristic garments. The work is much inferior to that of the face of the banner, and is said to be in part the work of Beccafumi (1486-1551).

Another superb, but little known picture, by Perugino (A.D. 1446-1524) in the Musée at Grenoble, shows the same type of nude figure of Sebastian bound to a tree. Face and figure alike are the very embodiment of youthfulness and grace, verging almost on effeminacy. In this picture S. Apolline stands beside Sebastian.

Exceptionally, and more particularly in the older pictures, the youthful Sebastian is depicted clothed in the costume of the period, with or without an arrow in his hand. In the Brera at Milan is a folding altar-piece of five panels by Nicolò da Foligno (A.D. 1430-92), in which he is represented as a youth in kilted tunic and hose. He is similarly clad in another picture in the Vatican, ‘ The Coronation of the



Virgin and Saints,' also by Nicolò da Foligno, and in a few others as well.

Sebastian is very frequently represented in plague pictures along with other saints: his most frequent companion by far is St. Roch. In the sacristy of S. Maria della Salute at Venice, itself a plague church, is Titian's well-known picture commemorating the great plague of A.D. 1512, in which St. Sebastian, St. Roch, and the physician-saints Cosmo and Damian stand before the throne of St. Mark, across whose majestic figure the shadow of a cloud has fallen. These groups of saints are not infrequently represented mediating with the Madonna.

Travelling through Italy from town to town one becomes aware that the land of pestilence has been roughly partitioned into separate dominions under the tutelage of varying presiding saints. In Milan it is Carlo Borromeo: in Venice, S. Rocco: in Rome, the Madonna: in Central Italy, in Siena, and in Florence, S. Sebastiano. In Florence he was the patron saint of the Compagnia della Misericordia, the institution that has for seven centuries been so closely interwoven with the daily life of the city, and has left no small mark on the products of Florentine art.

Christian sculpture has also seized the opportunity of the nude figure for a model. Well-known statues are those by Matteo Civitali (c. 1470) at Lucca, and by Puget (1622-94) in the church of Carignano at Genoa. A colossal recumbent figure of the saint by Bernini (1598-1680) lies beneath the high altar of the church of S. Sebastian on the Via Appia at Rome.

In Switzerland especially, but also in southern Germany and south-eastern France, wooden statues of Sebastian are commonly met with, mostly belonging to the three centuries following the Black Death. Several may be seen in the Historical Museum at Basle, more or less archaic in character, and a very fine example in the Cluny Museum at Paris. The

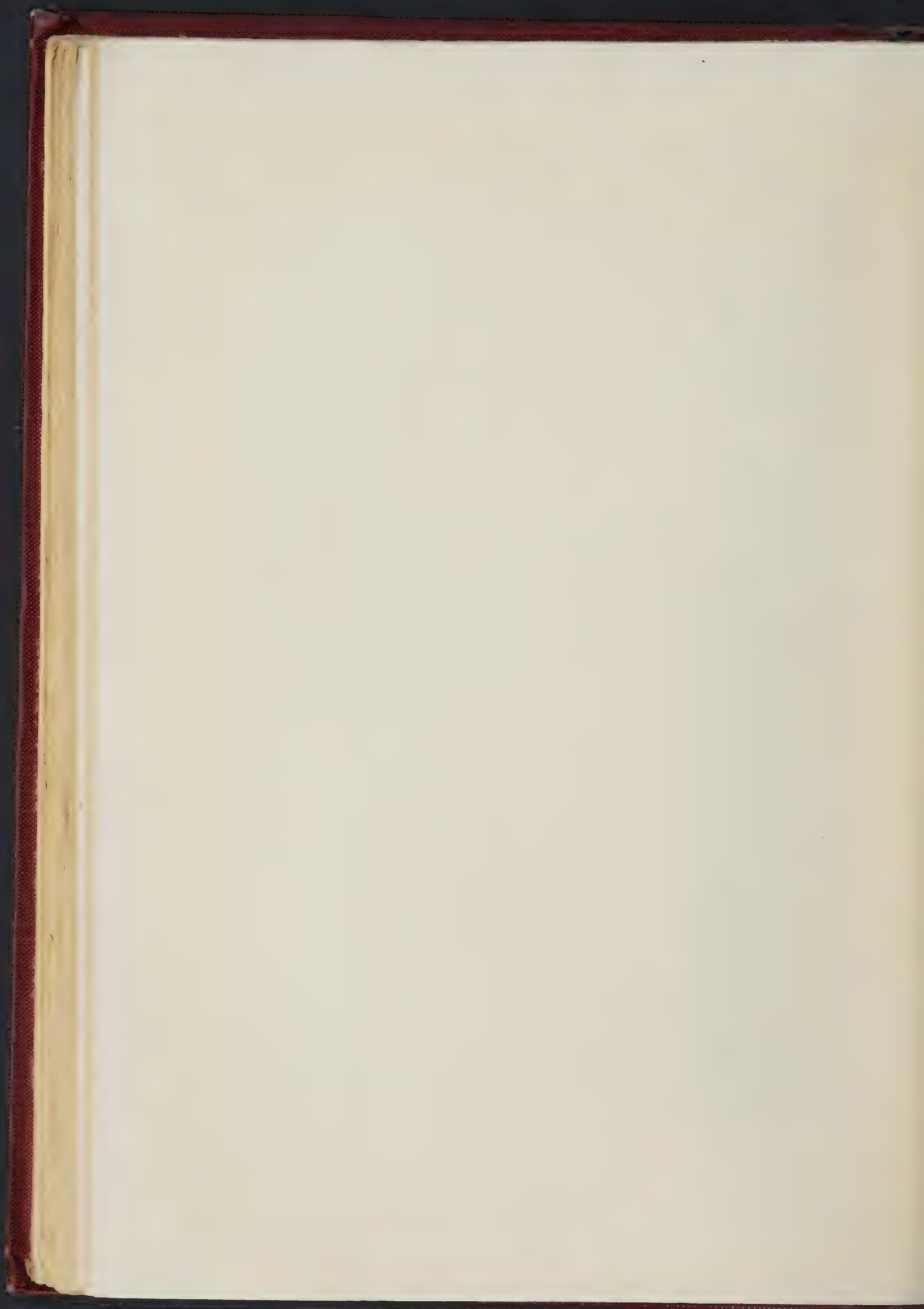




SS. MARK, SEBASTIAN, ROCH, COSMAS  
AND DAMIAN. BY TITIAN

Photograph by Naya, Venice





same museum also possesses a pair of quaint coloured high reliefs in wood of St. Sebastian and St. Roch respectively. These wooden effigies are naturally most common in districts where wood-carving has been extensively pursued.

It must not be supposed that the cult of Sebastian was widespread from the first, or that the record of its growth is continuous and unbroken from its inauguration in this Roman plague of A.D. 683. Circumstance chanced to be arrayed against its continuity. The seventh century was not a notable period of plague in Europe, and that was now the dominating epidemic. There was famine and pestilence in Ireland,<sup>1</sup> but its nature is not known, and the kings of Erin faced their Irish question in the spirit of Cromwell. In a season of famine they summoned the leading clergy and laity to a council to consider the situation. No one, in the circumstances, will dispute the propriety of their injunction to clergy and laity to observe a fast. But the further injunction that they should employ their hours of abstinence in praying that some sickness might carry off the surplus of the lower orders, as the excess of population was the cause of the famine, is more debatable. ('Petebant ut nimia multitudo vulgi per infirmitatem aliquam tolleretur, quia numerositas populi erat occasio famis.') At the instance of St. Gerald, who contended that the Almighty could relieve the situation more suitably and quite as easily by multiplying the fruits of the earth, it was proposed to recommend this course to His adoption, at any rate as a preliminary measure. But clergy and laity, headed by the holy St. Fechin, were in no mood for such half-hearted measures as promised no finality, and St. Gerald's suggestion was set aside. Pestilence followed in due course, and the Divine working was made manifest in that it claimed St. Fechin and the two kings of Erin among its innumerable victims.

In spite of the retrocession of plague from Europe after

<sup>1</sup> Bascombe, *History of Epidemic Diseases*.



the seventh century, Syria,<sup>1</sup> the Euphrates valley, and Irak were still devastated at frequent intervals by recurring epidemics. From this persistent source it spread as far as Constantinople in A.D. 697 and 794, in the latter case almost completely depopulating Constantinople according to Nicephoras Byzantinus. Constantinople was in such intimate relation, commercial and political, with Syria and Central Asia that transference of plague was wellnigh inevitable. After this there was a long lull in Europe, and to a less extent in Syria, until the eleventh century. It is often confidently stated that the Crusades brought plague back to Europe, but it must not be forgotten that there was a severe epidemic of plague on that continent in A.D. 1094, before the Crusades commenced. Doubtless they served to maintain the continuity of infection. The pestilence that decimated the army of Louis IX and carried off him and his son was by no means certainly bubonic plague. The surviving accounts suggest rather cholera or dysentery. Again, in A.D. 1167, the army of Frederick Barbarossa, while encamped before Rome, was swept away by a pestilence, that seems to have been bubonic plague, which penetrated into the city also and worked great havoc. Thomas à Becket, writing to Pope Alexander III after the retreat of Frederick, congratulates him on the Lord having destroyed Sennacherib's army. Again, in A.D. 1230, a destructive inundation of the Tiber was followed by plague, that led the Romans to recall the banished pope, Gregory IX. In A.D. 1244 plague was in Florence, and led to the institution of the Compagnia della Misericordia. Its foundations were laid in the fines paid by wool-porters for the use of foul and blasphemous language at their meeting-house. One of them, the good old Piero di Luca Borsi, induced them, when the total had reached a large sum, to spend it in the provision of six litters, one for each

<sup>1</sup> Kremer, *Ueber die grossen Seuchen des Orients, nach arabischen Quellen.*

ward of the city, and to select two of their members weekly for each litter, to carry sick persons to the hospitals or dead bodies to the mortuaries.

In A.D. 1294 plague was again widespread and severe in Europe, and a succession of scattered epidemics, of which the most severe were those of A.D. 1320 and 1333 respectively in southern France and Spain, led up to the virulent pandemic of A.D. 1348 and after, commonly known as the Black Death.

Out of the desolate wilderness of the Black Death arose the figure of St. Roch,<sup>1</sup> patron saint of the plague-stricken and intercessor against the plague. Born at Montpellier, the son of noble parents, probably about A.D. 1295, he seemed designed for a life of sanctity by the birthmark of a small red cross on his breast. So Mahomet before him had borne in the imprint of a mole between his shoulders the token of his divine mission. From boyhood he was attracted by the active virtues of the Redeemer, and aspired to follow that example rather than to devote himself to the life of the cloister. The death of his parents, before he was twenty years old, left him with great riches, which he distributed forthwith among the poor and hospitals. His lands he left in the management of his brother, and set out on foot, as a pilgrim, for Rome. On his way he found plague raging at Aquapendente. There he gave himself to the service of the sick in the hospital, and such was his skill and sympathy that his ministrations were regarded as more than human. The sick seemed to be healed by his mere prayers, or by the sign of the Cross as he stood over them, so that when the plague soon ceased, they in their enthusiasm attributed it to his intercession. So Roch himself became inspired with the belief in a divine Providence specially guiding his ministry. Hearing that plague was devastating the province of Romagna, he hastened thither and devoted himself to the sick in the cities of Casena and Rimini. Thence he went

<sup>1</sup> Caxton, *Golden Legend*; Jameson, *Sacred and Legendary Art*.



to Rome, where plague was raging fiercely (*c.* 1306), and for three years tended the sick, devoting himself to those most destitute of help. His constant prayer to God was that he might be a martyr in his task, but for long he passed unscathed through daily peril. Visiting city after city, wherever plague was rife, he succumbed at last to the infection at Piacenza, while nursing the sick in the hospital. Along with a burning inward fever, a horrible ulcer broke out on his left thigh. The pain was so intolerable that he shrieked aloud. Fearing to disturb the inmates of the hospital, he crawled into the street, but the officers would not let him remain there for fear of spreading infection. With the aid of his pilgrim's staff he dragged himself to a solitary spot outside the gates of Piacenza, and there laid himself down to die. But still a kind Providence watched over him. His little dog, that had attended him faithfully in all his pilgrimage, went daily into the city and brought back a loaf of bread, none knew whence. An angel came, too, and dressed his sore and tended him, till he was well. Others say that it was the dog of a countryman, one Gothard, that brought food to him. On his recovery he turned his steps back to his native Montpellier, but his sufferings had so changed him that even his own retainers there did not recognize him. He was arrested as a spy, and condemned by the judge, who chanced to be his own uncle, to be thrown into the public prison. Roch, believing it to be God's will, yielded to the punishment without revealing his identity, and languished in a dungeon for five years. One morning, when the jailer entered his cell, he found it filled with a bright supernatural light, but his prisoner dead, and by his side a writing that revealed his name and the words: 'All those that are stricken by the plague, and who pray for aid through the merits and intercession of St. Roch, the servant of God, shall be healed.' His uncle, the judge, gave him an honourable burial, and the whole city lamented his death.

St. Roch is believed to have died in A.D. 1327 in his thirty-second year. At Montpellier he was venerated from the first, and this veneration was quickened and extended by the great pandemic of A.D. 1348. But it was not till the fifteenth century that his cult became widespread. This was the direct consequence of an outbreak of plague at Constance in A.D. 1414, during that Council of prelates that condemned Huss to the stake. They were about to disperse and fly from danger, when a young German monk told them of the power of St. Roch. On his advice the Council ordered an effigy of the Saint to be carried in procession through the streets with prayers and litanies: and immediately the plague was stayed. His festival has been celebrated for centuries on the sixteenth day of August.

In A.D. 1485 the Venetians, who from their trade with the Levant, were constantly subject to plague, carried off the body of St. Roch from Montpellier by stealth, and the church of San Rocco was built to receive it.

Such is the legend of St. Roch. He and Sebastian commonly figure together in dedicatory plague pictures, as dual protectors against plague. They seem to represent in art two attitudes to suffering, St. Roch that of compassion, St. Sebastian that of courage and resignation—two attitudes well expressed in four short lines of an obscure Australian poet that deserve to be better known than they are:

Life is mostly froth and bubble :  
Two things stand like stone :  
Kindness in another's trouble,  
Courage in your own.

Coming into general knowledge about the time of the revival of art, the legend of St. Roch and his figure were favourite and familiar subjects in the Christian art of the West. The whole legend has been frequently used as a theme for the decoration of churches dedicated to his name: such a one may be seen in Siena, and another, though less



complete, in Venice. In the Scuola di S. Rocco his life-story is set out in a series of twenty carved reliefs on the walnut panelling of the upper hall.

Sometimes several scenes from his life are blended in a single picture. In the Brera, at Milan, is a picture of St. Roch with Madonna and Child, by Ambrogio da Fossano, called 'Borgognone' (A.D. 1480-1523). In the background are scenes from his life, among which his dog is shown carrying a loaf in its mouth. The picture formerly belonged to the Company of Charity of Milan.

St. Roch is generally represented as a man in the prime of life, with a short pointed beard, delicate features, and a gentle expression of countenance. As a rule he wears a pilgrim's dress, with a cockle-shell in his hat and a wallet at his side. In one hand he holds a long staff, while with the other he lifts his robe to show the plague sore in his groin or thigh. Very rarely he is figured as a youth in the dress of the period, and is then nearly always introduced to balance a similar Sebastian.

Numerous pictures deal with single episodes in his life—his tending the plague-sick, his healing by an angel, his life and death in prison. The best known are perhaps those by Tintoretto in the church of S. Rocco at Venice. Many show him praying among the sick, as in the picture by Domenichino of Bologna (A.D. 1584-1641) in the Palazzo Rosso at Genoa. An angel with a drawn sword hovers over the scene, and St. Roch holds out one arm, as though entreating the angel to put up his sword into its sheath. Jacopo Bassano (A.D. 1510-92), in a picture in the Brera, represents him among a number of plague victims, with hand raised in attitude of benediction.

A picture by the Swiss painter, Niklaus Manuel (A.D. 1484-1530), at Basle, painted in tempera on linen, shows St. Roch with a little angel tending his wound. It is typical of a large group of intercessory plague pictures. At the summit of the

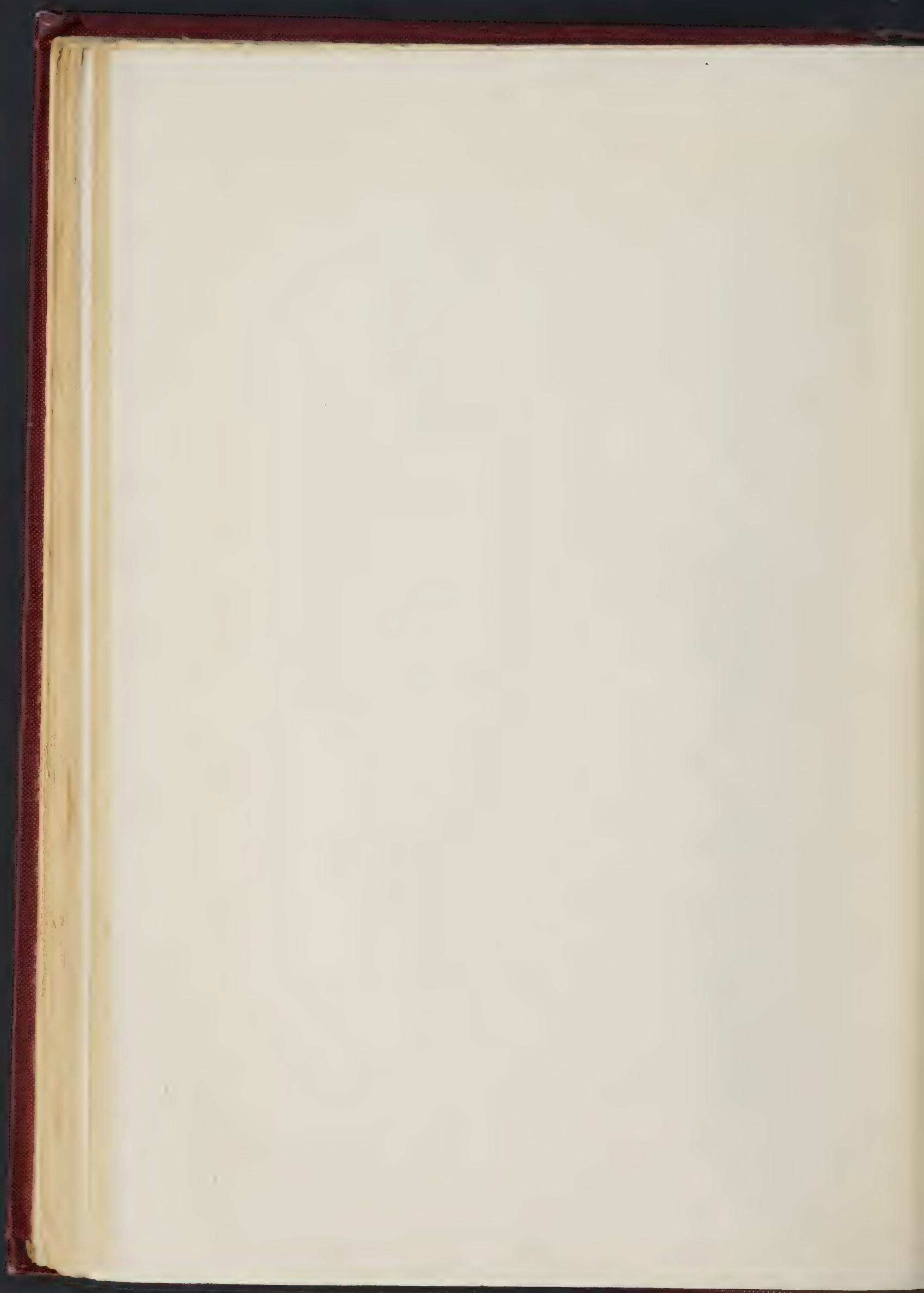




S. ROCH. BY AMBROGIO BORGOGNONE

Photograph by Anderson, Rome











AN INTERCESSORY PLAGUE PICTURE BY NIKLAUS  
MANUEL. S. ROCH TENDED BY AN ANGEL



picture is the Almighty in glory in the heavens. Beneath Him is St. Anna with the Virgin Mary and the Child Jesus : they are placed between the Almighty and the plague-stricken to indicate that they are the appropriate medium of intercession. They are flanked on the one side by St. Roch, and on the other by St. James. St. Anna appears in many pictures of this period, as Pope Alexander II in 1494 promoted her worship, by making her feast-day one of the chief festivals of the Church. At the foot of the picture is a rough delineation of the city attacked by plague : on the right of it, a group representing probably the donors of the picture : on the left, a group of sufferers, two of whom show plague marks on their limbs. On the woman's arm is a raised sore : on the man's arm black petechial blotches, on his body large circular spots, and an open red ulcer on the inner side of his leg.

One of the most famous pictures of St. Roch is the altarpiece by Rubens, at Alost, near Brussels. The upper part of the picture shows the interior of a prison illuminated by a supernatural light. St. Roch kneels looking up into the face of Christ, in radiant gratitude, as he receives his commission as patron saint against the plague. An angel holds a tablet on which is written, 'Eris in peste patronus,' in allusion to the words revealed in his cell at his death.

Statues of St. Roch are hardly so frequently met with as those of Sebastian : he was a less attractive model for sculptors. In the Musée of Grenoble is a quaint archaic wooden figure of St. Roch of the early fifteenth century, which stood formerly in the chapel of the Château of Bressieux. It shows him in pilgrim guise, holding aside his garments to show the bubo in his left groin. It is deeply incised, according to the surgical practice of the period.

The plague mark of St. Roch is depicted in a variety of forms. Sometimes it is simply a bubo in the groin, usually the left, or just below it, to satisfy artistic decency. This



form may be seen in a picture by Crivelli (A.D. 1468-93) of 'Four Saints', in the Academy at Venice, and in another of St. Roch and St. Sebastian, by Alfani, in the Pinacotheca at Perugia.

Far more commonly the mark is a short longitudinal incision in the upper part of either thigh, as in Sodoma's plague banner (see Plate VIII, p. 100).

Sometimes the incision is in the substance of a bubo. This may be seen in a portrait of St. Roch over a side altar in the church of S. Maria dei Servi at Siena.

Not infrequently the incision is slanting or transverse and displays a complete disregard for the femoral artery. A notable example is Titian's 'St. Mark and Saints' in the Salute at Venice (see Plate IX, p. 102).

Sometimes the hose is slit over the incision in the flesh, as though some bold and busy surgeon had been pressed for time. This may be seen in Caroto's picture of 'Four Saints' in the church of S. Fermo Maggiore at Verona: also in a picture by Perugino, 'Virgin and Saints,' in the cathedral at Perugia, and in another of St. Roch in the Palazzo Borromeo at Milan.

A solitary example of St. Roch with a black pustule on the inner side of his left thigh, surrounded by a pink zone of inflammation, may be seen in the Brera. The picture is by Bernardino Borgognone (A.D. 1490-1524).

In some of the *Pestblätter* a gash in the thigh is shown as well as a small circle, which would seem to indicate the circular plague pustule.

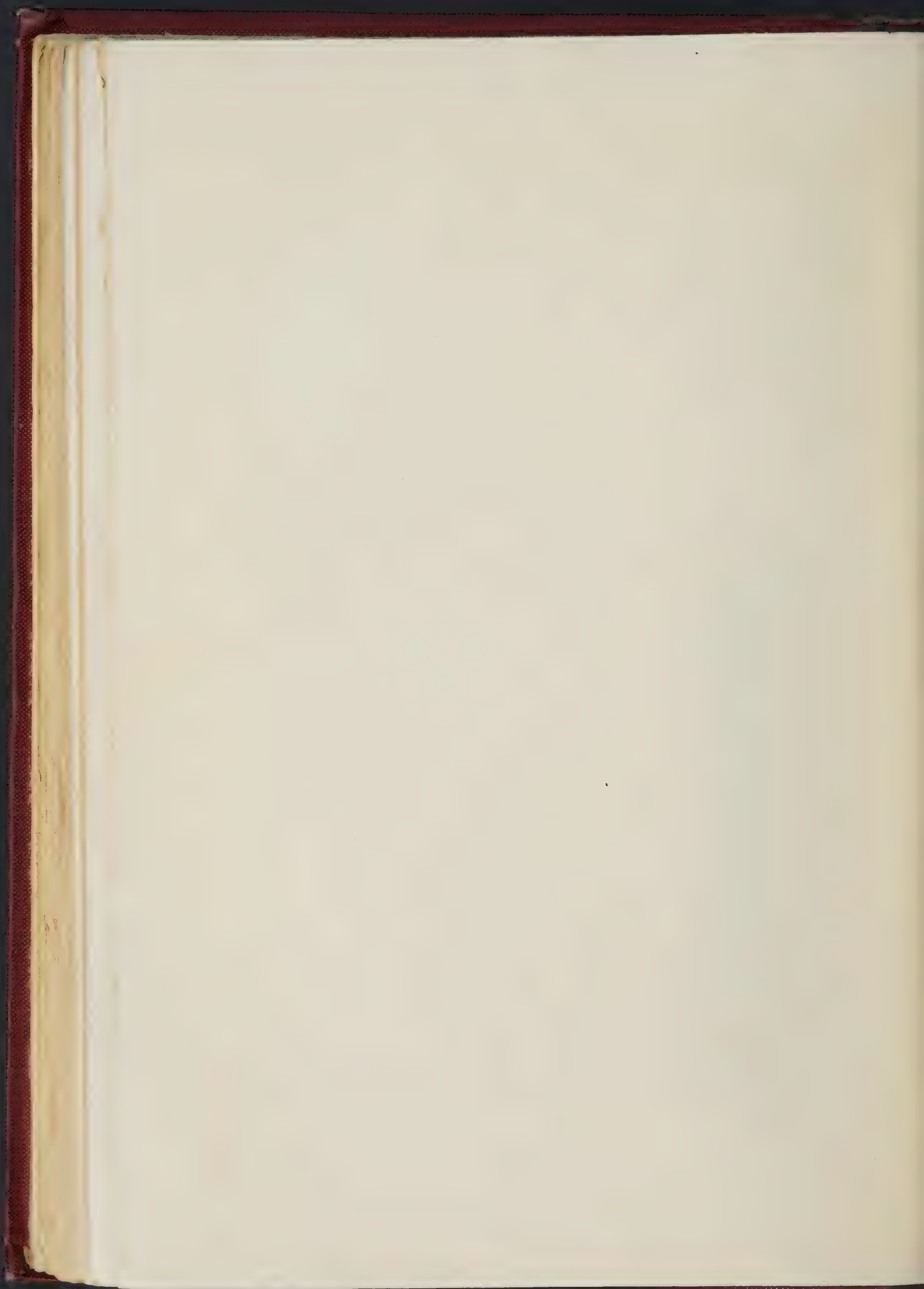




MADONNA AND CHILD, S. ANNA AND SAINTS  
BY G. FRANCESCO CAROTO

Photograph by Alinari, Rome





## CHAPTER VII

THERE is no need to rewrite the history of the Black Death: that has been admirably accomplished by Hecker and by Abbot Gasquet. It is still profitable, however, to investigate its by-effects in the domains of literature and art, and to consider its broad morbid features, as a contribution to the medical history of the time. The Black Death was the first great pandemic that left in its wake a complete and continuous succession of literary and historical records, in most points complementary, in some frankly contradictory, but for all that none the less instructive.

As to the starting-point of the pandemic there is a diversity of voices. Russian records place it in India, Greek in Scythia, English in India and Asiatic Turkey, Arabian in Tartary and the land of darkness. According to Italian tradition it originated in Cathay, to the north of China, and spread in every direction from that focus; northward by Bokhara and Tartary to the Black Sea; to India and the towns south of the Caspian, and to Asia Minor; and by way of Bagdad through Arabia and Egypt to the north of Africa. The leading contemporary Italian authority is Gabrielle de Mussi, a notary of Piacenza, who himself saw its outbreak in Upper Italy. In his 'Ystoria de morbo seu mortalitate qui fuit a 1348', first printed by Henschel in Haeser's *Archiv für die gesammte Medicin*, he describes how the plague was brought by ship from Caffa, a Genoese settlement in the Crimea. The Tartar city Tana (Port Azov), that had been appropriated by Italian merchants, was besieged in A.D. 1346 by an army of Tartars and Saracens. The Tartars expelled them, and followed them to Caffa, whither they had fled. Plague broke out fiercely among the besieging



Tartars, who, in the hope of infecting the garrison, threw their dead bodies into the city by means of engines of war. The garrison in turn cast them into the sea, but the city became infected and almost completely depopulated, a few survivors taking ship and carrying the disease with them to Italy in the autumn of A.D. 1347. Speaking of the infection of Caffa, de Mussi says 'the air became tainted and the wells of water poisoned, and in this way the disease spread rapidly in the city'. So the old idea of poison still prevails, but it is a virus derived from infected corpses, and not some extraneous poison compounded by a maleficent enemy. The poison was communicable also from man to man, for he says of the sailors coming from Caffa to Venice and Genoa that 'as if accompanied by evil spirits, as soon as they approached the land, they were death to those with whom they mingled'.

These ships seem to have infected Constantinople *en route*, and an account of its ravages there survives from the pen of the Emperor Cantacuzenus.<sup>1</sup> It is a mistake to regard his record as worthless material, because of its plagiarism of much of the language of Thucydides. In what is not appropriated from this source he gives a valuable clinical description of the disease. He notes the early low delirium, and distinguishes pneumonic, bubonic, and carbuncular types of the disease. He mentions cervical and axillary, but not inguinal buboes, and also the dark patches on the skin, that later came to be termed 'tokens'. He also asserts the incidence of the disease on the domestic animals.

In making for Genoa these ships put in at Messina in Sicily and left the infection there. Michael Platiensis (of Piazza), a Franciscan friar, has given an account of its course in this city. He refers to infection by means of the breath, and by contact with the belongings of, the infected. Gabrielle de Mussi seems to hold a similar belief. 'We' [i. e. the Genoese

<sup>1</sup> iv. 8.

sailors], he says, 'reach our homes: our kindred and our neighbours come from all parts to visit us. Woe to us, for we cast at them the darts of death! Whilst we spoke to them, whilst they embraced us and kissed us, we scattered the poison from our lips. Going back to their homes, they soon infected their whole families.'

De Mussi explicitly asserts that the plague was carried from the seaport of Genoa by some Genoese to Bobbio, and to his city of Piacenza. Here such was the mortality that 'no prayer was said, no solemn office sung, nor bell tolled for the funeral of even the noblest citizen: but by day and night the corpses were borne to the common plague pit without rite or ceremony'.

So Italy had been primarily infected at Venice and at Genoa, and from these sea-coast cities the disease spread itself over the whole Italian peninsula.

At Venice the example of Galen had sunk deep into the hearts of her physicians. They fled before the advancing enemy and shut themselves up in their houses, leaving the surgeons, led by Andrea di Padova, to fill their place. Physicians would do well to bear this occasion in mind, when they complain of the encroachments of surgery into the domain of medicine. On March 30, A.D. 1348, the Grand Council of Venice appointed three men to act as a Committee of Public Safety. These men had large burial-pits dug in one of the islands of the lagoon, and organized a service of boats to transport the bodies to them.

Rome was not so hard hit as some of the cities of Italy. Nevertheless, there remains to this day a monument of this plague in the flight of marble steps leading up to the church of Ara Coeli. These were set up by Giovanni de Colonna in October 1348, out of the spoils of the temple of the Sun on the Quirinal, and were designed for the use of the citizens, who with ropes round their necks and with ashes on their heads climbed the hill barefooted, to implore from the



Blessed Virgin the cessation of the plague. The thirteenth-century mosaic of the Madonna and Child may still be seen above the side entrance of Ara Coeli at the head of the well-worn stairs leading up from the Capitoline Piazza. The object of worship remains, but the worshippers are no more.

Lanciani<sup>1</sup> has reproduced an old engraving showing women ascending the marble stairs on their knees. This staircase would seem to be indicated both in Delaunay's picture and in the fresco by which it was inspired.

There is a legend in Rome, that as the panic-stricken people were carrying an effigy of the Madonna from the Ara Coeli to St. Peter's, the statue of the angel on the Castel S. Angelo bowed its head to do homage to it.

Plague was not the only enemy in Rome in A.D. 1348, for a terrible earthquake on September 9 and 10 wrought havoc among the remaining monuments of ancient Rome. Those citizens, who had escaped the plague and from death among the falling ruins, lived for weeks in the open Campagna with no shelter from the inclemency of the weather. Perhaps it was this accident that served to bring the visitation to an end at Rome more rapidly than elsewhere.

Agnolo di Tura, in his *Cronica Senese*, edited by Muratori, gives a graphic picture of the Black Death in Siena. A large uninteresting picture in the church of S. Maria dei Servi depicts St. Catharine attending the plague-stricken, and there is an ugly, almost ludicrous, fresco of the same subject in the House of St. Catharine of Siena. The painter brothers Pietro and Ambrogio Lorenzetti were both carried off by plague. But it is in the Duomo itself that the mark of the Black Death is most apparent. Begun in A.D. 1339, on the site of an older cathedral dedicated to the Madonna of the Assumption, the transepts were built, the foundations of the nave and choir were laid, and their walls partly raised according to the designs of Lando Orefice, when the Black

<sup>1</sup> *Golden Days of the Renaissance in Rome.*

Death broke out in the city in A.D. 1348. The money collected for the building was diverted to urgent public purposes, and the work, once suspended, has never been completely accomplished. The present cathedral, splendid as it is, is a mere fragment of the magnificent fabric, in which Orefice purposed to enshrine a memorial to the glory of fourteenth-century Siena.

The little Cappella di Piazza, attached as a loggia to the Palazzo Publico of Siena, was set up in gratitude for the cessation of the plague that carried off no less than thirty thousand persons. It was commenced in A.D. 1352 and completed in A.D. 1376. Hard by Siena the citizens of San Gimignano vowed an altar to St. Fabian and St. Sebastian as the price of their protection, and set it up between the doors of the Pieve or Collegiata. Above the place where once it stood is now the fresco of Benozzo Gozzoli, commemorating the plague of A.D. 1464.

No less a man than Petrarch<sup>1</sup> has chronicled this plague at Parma. His letter is in no sense descriptive, but rather a long-drawn-out wail over the devastation, the loss of friends and relations, and the magnitude of the destruction, that seemed to him to threaten the utter extinction of the human race. Affectation is the key-note of his lamentations, that are freely interspersed with allusions to the ancient classics. Laura had died of plague at Avignon in A.D. 1348, and Petrarch in sadness of soul wrote these lines on the manuscript of his beloved Vergil, now in the Ambrosian Library at Milan :

‘Laura, illustrious by her virtues, and long celebrated in my songs, first greeted my eyes in the days of my youth, the 6th April, 1327, at Avignon ; and in the same city, at the same hour of the same 6th April, but in the year 1348, withdrew from life, whilst I was at Verona, unconscious of my loss. The melancholy truth was made known to me by letters, which I received at Parma on the 19th May.’

<sup>1</sup> *Epistolae de rebus familiaribus*, viii. 7.



' Her chaste and lovely body was interred on the evening of the same day in the Church of the Minorites : her soul, as I believe, returned to heaven, whence it came.'

' To write these lines in bitter memory of this event, and in the place where they will most often meet my eyes, has in it something of a cruel sweetness, but I forget that nothing more ought in this life to please me, which by the grace of God need not be difficult to one who thinks strenuously and manfully of the idle cares, the empty hopes, and the unexpected end of the years that are gone.'

The Florentines, by way of rehabilitating their city after the Black Death, founded a university, and offered Petrarch a professorial chair, which he declined.

Matteo Villani<sup>1</sup> wrote a plain unvarnished account of the state of Florence during the Black Death, but it has found little favour beside the lighter sketch that stands as a prelude to the *Decameron*. His brother Giovanni, the Florentine historian, was one of the early victims, and Matteo takes up his history at the point at which he left it, and begins with a description of the epidemic. Famine had preceded the plague, and like it was regarded as sent by Heaven for the punishment of sin. But the energy of the government, in importing corn and distributing it to the destitute, had done much to relieve the distress, when this worse enemy presented itself at the gates.

Both Villani and Boccaccio enlarge on the futility of all measures, preventive and remedial alike, and the intense infectiveness of the disease. They believed that it could be communicated by a look, as well as by contact with the person or belongings of an infected subject. Boccaccio mentions the speedy death of two pigs from rooting among some infected clothing. Some pinned their faith on strict seclusion : some on temperate living, some on intemperance : others sought safety in the carrying of aromatic substances. Both Villani and Boccaccio lay stress on the utter depravity and demoralization engendered by the plague. Great

<sup>1</sup> Bk. I, c. 4.

uncertainty of life has never failed to generate corresponding recklessness. It has always been the same tale in every desperate city ; it was so when Jerusalem, panic-stricken at the threatened attack of Sennacherib, gave itself over to wild revelry : ' And in that day did the Lord God of Hosts call to weeping and to mourning, and to baldness, and to girding with sackcloth : but behold joy and gladness, slaying oxen, and killing sheep, eating flesh and drinking wine : let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.' Matteo Villani traces to the Black Death the social and moral degeneracy and the political anarchy, that were rampant in Florentine life, in the centuries that followed close upon it. Family affection is apt to reach its lowest ebb in the houses of a plague-stricken city. Villani and Boccaccio echo the language of Thucydides when they tell of parents deserting children, and husbands wives, in their hour of need, and the neglect of the sacred rites of sepulture. The plague raged in Florence from April to September, and Antoninus, Archbishop of Florence, computes the mortality within the city at 60,000 persons, two-thirds of the total population. Boccaccio actually raises the figure to 100,000 between March and July only, but this figure, if correct, must comprise also the surrounding district, which suffered only less severely than the city itself. One bright record stands out against this dark background of social demoralization in the devotion of the Compagnia della Misericordia to their self-appointed task. Instituted in A.D. 1244 for the service of the sick, they now also lent themselves to the transport of the dead. A picture by Cigoli (A.D. 1559-1613), now in the church of the Misericordia, shows the brotherhood in red robes—now changed to black—gathering up the dead and dying at the foot of Giotto's Tower. The bearers may be seen to this day in the streets of Florence in the same robes and hoods masking the whole face but the eyes, but the hand-litters and sedans of Cigoli's picture have now been



slung on wheels and sanctified to modern use with the addition of a motor ambulance. Great wealth flowed into the coffers of the guild from men who desired to crown a vicious life with a comfortable death and a decent burial.

The horrors of the plague-stricken city, with which Boccaccio has prefaced his *Decameron*, stand out in striking contrast to the gay frivolity of the young men and women round whom his romance ranges. Plague and pleasure jostle each other in jarring juxtaposition. Boccaccio of set purpose chose this dark background for the staging of his brighter theme. Thucydides had done the same before him, in setting the panegyric of Pericles side by side with the plague of Athens : and Manzoni has done so after him in the romance of *Promessi Sposi*. Perhaps also he had learnt, amid the fierce realities of the plague, to envisage life as it is, and so present it to his readers.

Niebuhr, in tracing the decadence of Roman literature to the Antonine plague, cites as a parallel illustration the influence of the Black Death on early Florentine literature. In the latter case, at any rate, it is difficult to bring his dictum into line with the actual circumstances. It would seem rather that the break in the vernacular Florentine literature after Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, was deliberate, and in no sense accidental. What Petrarch perceived, and perceived unerringly, was the poverty of the material on which the vernacular had maintained a starved existence ; and he saw in the ancient classics, in their mythology, in their speculative freedom, in the principles of their art, liberation from the bondage that the Church had laid on literature. What he did not perceive was that in reverting to ancient modes of thought it was needless, nay even harmful, to adopt also the language of the ancients. It was not open to him to see, as it is to us, that no great work of literature has ever been produced in any language but that in which the writer

speaks and feels and thinks : any tongue but the tongue of his daily life must needs be artificial and inanimate. Petrarch himself little guessed that with posterity his fame would rest on his *Rime* in the vernacular, and not on his epistles and multifarious dissertations in a lifeless Latin language. It is this mistaken teaching of Petrarch that explains the abrupt break of a century or more in vernacular Florentine literature, to which the Black Death can have been at most a trivial contributory cause. As soon as this mistake came to be recognized Florentine literature flows on again in its old channel in the full stream of the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century masterpieces of Ariosto, of Tasso, and the rest. It was the advice of Petrarch that turned Boccaccio from the vernacular to Latin, after he had completed in his *Decameron* a masterpiece of Italian prose. The influence of the classical revival that Petrarch had brought to life was destined also slowly to secularize Florentine art, but the time of its complete emancipation was not yet.

The Black Death first touched French soil at Marseilles, brought thither, it was thought, by ships from Genoa. Simon de Covino, a doctor, described the features of the disease as he witnessed it at the neighbouring town of Montpellier, in Latin hexameter verse. He clearly recognized its contagious character, for he says, 'By a single touch or a single breath of the plague-stricken they perished.'

Of the plague at Avignon both lay and medical accounts survive. A full description is contained in a letter from an anonymous canon to his friends in Bruges. He remarks on the virulence of the contagion, and describes both pneumonic and bubonic types of the disease. He says that Clement VI ordered bodies to be examined after death, in the hope of discovering the origin of the disease. This fact should be noted by those who assert that the Church interpreted the *De Sepulturis* bull of Boniface VIII (A.D. 1300) as prohibiting the anatomy of human bodies. The autopsies disclosed no



more than inflammation of the lungs in the pneumonic cases. Similar examinations, previously undertaken in Italy, had also yielded no better result. Clement also ordained expiatory processions and penitential litanies. Within the precincts of his palace, to which his medical attendant, Gui de Chauliac, confined him, he lent his own presence to the whole ceremonial that he prescribed. But he did not neglect to keep large fires alight in his apartments, as Pope Nicholas IV (A.D. 1288-92) had done at Rome in a previous visitation. Only those who have been at Avignon at midsummer can appreciate the price that Clement was ready to pay for immunity.

Clement's physician, Gui de Chauliac, says that the plague began at Avignon in January, and lasted for seven months.<sup>1</sup> In his view the causes of the pandemic were two-fold: universal, consisting in a conjunction of the planets: and special, dependent on the feeble constitution of the individual, whereby it came about that labouring men were chiefly attacked. But then as now the scared populace was proof against pontifical pronouncements from the Chair of Medicine. They saw in it the handiwork of Jews spreading poison throughout the world, so they put them to death. They saw in it malevolence of lepers, so they drove them out. They saw in it a plot of feudal overlords for their extinction, so they remained within their houses. And for completer security they set a guard around the towns and villages, who accosted each newcomer and compelled him to swallow any ointments or powders found upon him.

De Chauliac describes two prevalent types of the disease. The one type, the pneumonic, prevailed only for the first two months, and was characterized by spitting of blood, extreme infectiousness, and death in three days. The second type, the bubonic, prevailed throughout the five succeeding months, and was characterized by boils, by

<sup>1</sup> *Traité II, Doct. ii, ch. 5.*

buboes chiefly in the armpits and groins, by slight infectiousness, and death in five days. The mortality extended to no less than three-fourths of the total population, so that to get rid of the bodies they were driven to throw them into the Rhone, after Clement had pronounced a blessing on its waters.

To Gui de Chauliac the best of all preservatives was flight, aided, or perhaps we should say embarrassed, by the free use of aloetic purgatives.

He did not fly himself, for he says, with the *naïveté* of a Pepys, 'As for me, to avoid infamy, I did not dare absent myself, but still I was in continual fear.' (Et moy pour euitier infamie, n'osay point m'absâter : mais avec continuelle peur me preseruay tant que ie peux, moyennant les susdicts remedes.) His hesitancy was to prove his undoing, for he was himself infected towards the end of the epidemic—but recovered after six weeks. Among other preservatives he reckons venesection, purification of the air by means of fires, comforting the heart with treacle and apples and things of savoury flavour, consoling the humours with Galen's Armenian bole, and the prevention of putrefaction by the use of bitter things. Should the disease defy all these precautions, then he commends, as curative measures, bleedings and evacuations, with electuaries and cordial syrups. Buboes should be ripened with poultices of figs and boiled onions, pounded and mixed with leaven and butter : then they should be opened and treated like ulcers. Carbuncles are to be leeches, scarified, and cauterized—an improvement on the disastrous treatment meted out to Felix, bishop of Nantes, on a previous occasion.

Raymond Chalin de Vinario, another practitioner in Avignon during the plague, adds but little to what Gui de Chauliac has to say. He describes a solid cord, red or variously discoloured, which appeared in some cases on the body surface, with a carbuncle at one end and a pestilential



tubercle at the other. This can hardly have been anything else than an acute lymphangitis.

It is clear from the descriptions of the various writers that a large proportion of the cases in this pandemic were of pneumonic type: hence its virulence and its infectiousness.

Amid all the panic of the Black Death, persecution of the Jews broke out with even greater ferocity than during the Crusades in the twelfth century. Some victim was needed to appease the maddened populace: so the Jews were accused of poisoning the wells, and even of infecting the air. Circumstantial accounts were circulated throughout Europe of secret operations directed from Toledo. The concoction of poisons from spiders, owls, and other supposed venomous animals was described, and its mode of distribution made known. So well did their accusers deceive themselves that in many places the springs and wells were sealed, so that no one might use them, and the inhabitants of many cities had to rely on rain and river water. If confirmation of poison were ever needed, the rack could be trusted to procure it: or, failing that, men could be found vile enough to deposit poison in places in which circumstances demanded its presence. Those who escaped the fury of the mob fell into the clutches of an inexorable justice. In the case of the Jews the suspicion of poisoning was prompted by the fact that at this time the practice of medicine, at any rate in southern Europe, was chiefly in the hands of Jewish physicians. Hideous massacres of Jews had taken place in southern France and Spain in the previous epidemics of A.D. 1320 and 1333, as we know from the writings of Rabbi Joshua.

The first outbreak of murderous ferocity seems to have occurred at Chillon, on the Lake of Geneva, in September and October, A.D. 1348. Here it was merely the culmination of an accusation of poisoning the wells so long previously as

the epidemic of A.D. 1320. In face of the common danger, high and low bound themselves together by a solemn oath to extirpate the Jews by fire and the sword. Chillon summoned Bern, and Bern sent on the summons to Basle, Freyburg, and Strasbourg to join them in their righteous task. The record of confessions extracted from the Jews by the ordeal of torture within the Castle of Chillon has been rescued from oblivion by the vigilance of Hecker.<sup>1</sup> In Basle and Freyburg the Jews were seized, one and all, and without form of trial were burnt to death in a wooden building, specially constructed for the purpose, while at Strasbourg no less than two thousand Jews were immolated on a wooden scaffold, erected in their own burial-ground. Such as escaped were ruthlessly murdered in the streets, saving a few only to whom freedom was granted on submission to baptism. But for these the respite from renewed accusation and death was only temporary. Faithlessness to their own religion, or physical charms sufficient to assuage the blood-lust of their Christian persecutors, constituted the only acceptable claims to a passing mercy. Strasbourg betrayed the true ground of its hatred of the Jews in an order of its senate that all pledges and bonds should be returned to the debtors and the money divided among the working-people. Those who were unwilling to soil their hands with blood-money presented their share of the spoils to monasteries, at the prompting of their confessors. At Spire, Mayence, and Eslingen, voluntary immolation in their own houses alone saved the Jews from more inhuman tortures. Some were murdered in the open streets and their dead bodies thrown into the Rhine in empty casks, so that they might not infect the air. Now and again banishment was substituted for burning, only for the outcasts to perish at the hands of a savage and blood-thirsty countryfolk.

<sup>1</sup> *Epidemics of the Middle Ages.*



When the houses of the Jews were burnt a ban was set on entry into the ruins of their habitations: the site was accursed, as the site of Jericho of old. But the bricks of the destroyed dwellings and the tombstones of the victims were in due time rendered as an acceptable thank-offering to God in the repair of Christian churches. In Austria the same accusations were brought against the Jews as elsewhere, and numbers were burnt to death in Vienna and throughout the country. Where there were no Jews, as in Leipsic, Magdeburg, and other places, the grave-diggers were accused of propagating the plague for their own sordid ends.

It should be set to the credit of Clement VI that he extended his personal protection to the Jews at Avignon, issuing two bulls, asserting their innocence, and calling on Christians to refrain from persecution. The Emperor Charles IV did what lay in his power, short of drawing the sword, to check the outrages perpetrated by the Bohemian nobles. Duke Albert of Austria exacted from the persecutors punishments only less cruel than they themselves had inflicted, but even so did not avail to save hundreds of Jews from the flames, in his own fortress of Kyberg. Other lesser princes, more often for bribes than for pity, extended some measure of protection to the wretched Jews, earning for themselves the *sobriquet* of 'Jew-masters'. It was no light matter for a private person to shelter a Jew, for the penalty was often exacted on the rack or at the stake.

Basnage<sup>1</sup> states that the large number of Jews in modern Poland may be traced to the fact that King Casimir the Great (A.D. 1333-70), yielding to the entreaties of a favourite Jewess, Esther, granted sanctuary to such Jews as sought it. But actually Casimir only confirmed an edict of protection promulgated in A.D. 1264, and Poland had then already afforded a haven of refuge to the Jews, who had fled from the

<sup>1</sup> *Histoire des Juifs.*

cruel massacres perpetrated in the enthusiasm of the first Crusade.

In England the Black Death served to revive the perennial charges brought against the Jews—that they stole Christian children and killed them, especially at Easter-time, a charge that Chaucer, mindful of Hugh of Lincoln, has enshrined in the pathetic verse of his Prioress. They were charged also with outraging the Host, as well as with spreading poison.

The Black Death seems to have fallen with greater violence on Austria than on Germany,<sup>1</sup> perhaps on account of its close contact with Italy. It devastated Vienna from Easter to Michaelmas of A.D. 1349, carrying off thirty thousand out of a population of less than one hundred thousand persons. The excited populace personified it as the Pest-Jungfrau, who had only to raise her hand to infect a victim. She was to be seen flying through the air in the form of a blue flame, and also proceeding out of the mouths of dead and dying. Some saw the plague poison descend in the form of a ball of fire. One such was seen hovering over the town, but a bishop exorcised it by prayer, so that it fell harmless to earth. A stone effigy of the Madonna was set up in the street, where it fell. All medical aid proved useless, and amulets, potions, and preservative electuaries were in general use. Segregation of the sick was attempted, by nailing up doors and windows of infected houses, but even so dead bodies littered the streets. Huge plague pits were dug for the reception of the dead. Flagellant processions sought to excite divine compassion by the ritual of peripatetic penitence.

The genesis of the Flagellant movement must be looked for further back in the history of pestilence than the Black Death. The idea of mortifying the flesh by the penance of scourging is of ancient origin, and at least as early as the eleventh century brotherhoods were devoted to this ritual.

<sup>1</sup> Krafft-Ebing, *Geschichte der Pest in Wien*.



The processions of these *Devoti*, as they were termed in Italy, were originated by St. Anthony in A.D. 1231, and we hear of them under the name of Flagellants in Vienna during the plague of A.D. 1261.

One Monachus Paduanus, quoted by Hecker, has left a record of the early days of the *Devoti*.

‘When the land was polluted by vices and crimes, an unexampled spirit of remorse suddenly seized the minds of the Italians. The fear of Christ fell upon all: noble and ignoble, old and young, and even children of five years of age, marched through the streets with no covering but a scarf round the waist. They each carried a scourge of leather thongs, which they applied to their limbs, amid sighs and tears, with such violence that the blood flowed from the wounds. Not only during the day, but even by night, and in the severest winter, they traversed the cities with burning torches and banners, in thousands and tens of thousands, headed by their priests, and prostrated themselves before the altars. They proceeded in the same manner in the villages: and the woods and mountains resounded with the voices of those whose cries were raised to God. The melancholy chaunt of the penitent alone was heard. Enemies were reconciled: men and women vied with each other in splendid works of charity, as if they dreaded that Divine Omnipotence would pronounce on them the doom of annihilation.’

Before this mediaeval pageant of penitence the mind insensibly reverts to the ancient ritual of the *Salii* on this same Italian soil, to their choric hymn of expiation, to the *supplicationes*, and to the love-feast of the *lectisternium* of later days.

Under the stimulus of the Black Death, the Brotherhood of the Cross, or Cross-bearers, arose out of the ranks of the Flagellants, first in Hungary, and afterwards in Germany. Ditmar<sup>1</sup> has left the following account of their processions:

‘Their heads covered as far as the eyes: their look fixed on the ground, accompanied by every token of the

<sup>1</sup> *Chronicon*, 1580.

deepest contrition and mourning. They were robed in sombre garments, with red crosses on the breast, back and cap, and bore triple scourges, tied in three or four knots, in which points of iron were fixed. Tapers and magnificent banners of cloth of gold were carried before them: wherever they made their appearance they were welcomed by the ringing of the bells: and the people flocked from all quarters, to listen to their hymns and to witness their penance, with devotion and tears.'

When the Flagellants entered the town they would hand the citizens a document setting forth God's anger and determination to destroy mankind, had not the Virgin Mary interceded for them. Some of the crosses carried by the Flagellants are still to be seen at Gross-Glogau, Kaysersberg, and Ammerschweyer in Upper Alsace.

This spirit of religious fanaticism spread like wildfire through Hungary, Germany, Bohemia, Silesia, Poland, and Flanders, and even beyond these countries. In the autumn of 1349 some six-score Flagellants crossed from Holland and paraded the streets of London, but the metropolis had not then acquired the taste for processions, and ejected them as undesirable aliens. At last the movement had alighted on uncongenial soil. So great was the number of the Flagellants that they became a cause of well-founded anxiety to the clergy, whose churches they actually invaded, and whose influence they threatened to supersede. Their hymns were in every mouth, and one of them, the chief psalm of the Cross-bearers, is reproduced by Hecker in his *Epidemics of the Middle Ages*.

The secular authorities also saw cause for alarm at the growing numbers and power of the brotherhood, bound together by common ritual and common regulations, and capable, under bold and designing leaders, of exerting their influence in the affairs of states. The Emperor Charles IV appealed to the Holy See for protection against the heretics, and Clement VI responded by issuing a bull from Avignon on October 20, 1349, prohibiting the pilgrimages on pain



of excommunication. Philip VI forbade altogether their reception in France, and several other ruling princes followed his example. Relentless persecution soon took the place of unthinking homage. The processions were abandoned, but the spirit that animated them was not dead, and the same fanaticism broke out again in Germany in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and in Italy even as late as the eighteenth, under the influence of successive plagues.

The Black Death, sweeping throughout England, is believed to have carried off one-half of the total population. Historians have told the tale of the resulting emancipation of the labouring class, but we find that it has also left its mark on the education, the literature, the art, and the architecture of England.

In education, it helped greatly to bring about the revival of English in the schools. After the Norman Conquest French had gradually become the language of education: not of set purpose, for the Conqueror himself tried ineffectually to learn English. But most of the education was in the hands of the clergy, and as many Frenchmen had been put in charge of monasteries and of parochial cures, it was inevitable that French should become the language of education, and so diffuse itself generally through the educated part of the nation, both French and English. About the middle of the fourteenth century Higden, in his *Polychronicon*, states that French was still the language taught in the schools, and had been so since the Norman Conquest. In A.D. 1385 Trevisa, commenting on Higden's statement, writes:

'This maner was myche yused tofore the first moreyn [before the 1349 murrain], and is siththe som dele [since somewhat] ychaungide. For John Cornwaile, a maister of gramer, chaungide the lore [learning] in gramer scole and construction of [from] Frensch into Englisch, and Richard Pencriche lerned that maner teching of him, and other men of Pencriche. So that now, the yere of owre Lord a thousand

thre hundred foure score and fyve, of the secunde King Rychard after the Conquest nyne, in alle the grammer scoles of England children leveth Frensch, and construeth an [in] Englisch.'

Despite the adoption of French as the language of the schools, English had survived as a colloquial language side by side with its supplanter. In the conflict between the two prestige and fashion were on the side of French, tradition and nationality on the side of English: and sooner or later the balance was bound to incline to the side of the national language. The fusion of the two had inevitably led to the corruption of each, but the corrupted French, at any rate after the loss of Normandy, had no standard of purity at hand to limit corruption, while the corrupted English was constantly purified by contact with the native tongue, and by the existence of a pre-Norman vernacular literature. National spirit, stimulated by international strife, was ripe for completing the task, that John Cornwall had begun in a single west country school; and the Black Death, by sweeping away the existing teachers and making place for others of native stock, did much to facilitate the change. The triumph of the vernacular operated a mighty revolution in our national literature, paving the way for Langland and Chaucer. Thomas Usk, in the Prologue to his *Testament of Love*, completed not later than A.D. 1387, alludes to the utter corruption of the imported French, and the Prioress in the *Canterbury Tales*, although she could speak French 'ful fayre and festishly' spoke it only

After the scole of Stratford atte Bowe,  
For Frenche of Paris was to hire [her] unknowe.

One other immediate effect of the Black Death was to reduce the literary output of the monasteries to its lowest level. No one can fail to be struck by the scantiness and sterility of the contemporary chronicles, which characterize the period following the Black Death, and the reasonable



explanation of this abrupt change would seem to lie in the notorious depletion of the monastic households. The tragedy of the Provençal brotherhood, in which Petrarch's brother and his dog alone survived to tend and guard the monastery, found an echo in a like desolation of many an English monastery. The special incidence on the monasteries was perhaps due to the monks moving freely among the sick, and giving them sanctuary within their cloister. The sick, too, exhibited often an ill-timed gratitude in bequeathing their clothes to the monasteries. Doctors, as Chaucer remarked of his day, were only for the rich.

In England, as in Italy, the Black Death left its mark on architecture in the abrupt arrest of schemes of construction in course of execution. Many such breaks may be detected in the church architecture of the fourteenth century, and a notable example is furnished in the unfinished towers of the church of St. Nicholas at Yarmouth.

Prior<sup>1</sup> indicates a similar break of continuity in the building of York Minster. The west front and the nave were in course of construction, when the Black Death appeared, and the result is a makeshift wood vaulting to the nave. Then the building of the choir was delayed for twelve years, till A.D. 1361, and in its structure the flowing lines of the Decorated style, seen in the west front, have given place to the formal stiffness of the Perpendicular.

In London the effect is much less conspicuous than in the northern parts of England, perhaps because it was easier to replenish the supply of masons in the metropolis than elsewhere. The building of St. Stephen's Chapel in Westminster and the completion of the Abbey cloisters seem to have proceeded continuously, and with no change of style, throughout the Black Death and the following years: and the same is the case with Gloucester Cathedral.

Prior considers that the Black Death played a leading

<sup>1</sup> E. S. Prior, *Cathedral Builders*.

part in the superseding of the Decorated by the Perpendicular type, and in the diffusion of the latter from its Gloucester home throughout England. The lack of builders led to masons passing from one district to another, removing them from the conditions of local stone favourable to their best work and to originality of style. The inevitable result was that the architectural style easiest of expression in any form of stone was bound to prevail, and that style was the Perpendicular. Examples of this transformation in the years following close on the Black Death are numerous, in the nave and cloisters of Canterbury Cathedral, in the west front of Winchester Cathedral, and elsewhere.

The same stereotyped monotony, the same continuous decline in the skill of execution, the same obvious diminution of interest in the craft of the artificer, as is seen in the building construction, are manifest also in the figure-sculpture and traceries of the period. The variation of artistic expression, that in the two preceding centuries had progressed steadily from strength to strength, comes to an abrupt cessation, and is content with the incessant repetition of inanimate models.

'The figure-sculpture<sup>1</sup> of the later mediaeval church under such conditions grew to be especially of the shop, according to pattern and not of fresh adventure. It no longer took its place in the business of the building-yard, but was provided for—not worked—in the building. The constructing mason left niches for statues, and on occasion worked bosses with subject relief, cornices with 'angel' sculpture, and gargoyles with 'devil' sculpture. But this figure work was not essential, and a whole majestic piece of architecture in Perpendicular style might rise from the ground and never ask for the craft of the figure-sculptor at all. The works of the imager were now in effect furniture, which could be bought in the city and added to the building at any time. Accordingly statues and reliefs ceased, in fifteenth-century practice, to be carved immediately by

<sup>1</sup> Prior and Gardner, *Mediaeval Figure Sculpture in England*, p. 390.



the mason upon the building: they became outside works conceived in no intimate relation to it.'

Gasquet maintains that a similar breach of continuity may be observed in the manufacture of stained glass, and that there is a noticeable change in style after the Black Death. Speaking broadly, the styles of stained glass correspond to the styles of architecture, but in each case are a little later: so that the contention comes to this, that there is an unbridged gap between the late Decorated and early Perpendicular. Yet one cannot but recall the ante-chapel windows of New College, Oxford, and the east window of Gloucester Cathedral, in each of which the transition from Decorated to Perpendicular is apparent.

## CHAPTER VIII

FOR three centuries and more after the Black Death plague was endemic throughout central and southern Europe, and its presence is indelibly recorded in the productions of contemporary art. Dances of Death, plague banners, votive and commemorative paintings, and actual representations of plague scenes all bear silent testimony to the abiding presence of the enemy within the gates. *Memento mori*, with its dismal foreboding, was the appropriate motto of the age. Innocent III in his *De Contemptu Mundi* had said the last word on the misery of human existence, and the shame and degradation of the human body, polluted and polluting, long before the Black Death: but henceforward the gloom that haunted the soul of this great successor of St. Peter seems to diffuse itself throughout the world.

Dancing from early ages has been associated with the conception of death. In many primitive races these dances seem to pertain to mimetic magic, and purport to expedite the passing of the spirit of the deceased. Both Greeks and Romans preserved dancing in their funeral celebrations, and representations of these funeral dances have been found in connexion with Greek and Etruscan tombs. These are commonly a file of maidens, holding each other's hands, and led by a youthful male coryphaeus. Anacreon,<sup>1</sup> Tibullus,<sup>2</sup> and Vergil<sup>3</sup> all depict the revelry of the dance in the land of departed souls, and joy is the key-note of the dance. Christianity, in superseding paganism, for better or for worse inculcated a gloomy conception of death, as a punishment, a penalty for original sin. Recurrent epidemics of pestilence

<sup>1</sup> Ode 4.

<sup>2</sup> Bk. I, Eleg. 3.

<sup>3</sup> *Aeneid*, vi. 644.



served to transform the conception into that of an inexorable foe revelling in the subversion of human happiness and the futility of human affairs. The literature of the age no less than its art bears the imprint of this conception. Petrarch has left us a *Triumph of Death*, and Langland in his *Vision of Piers Plowman*<sup>1</sup> has given us in verse a Dance of Death:

Death came driving after, and all to dust pashed  
Kynges and Knightes, Kayzers and Popes,  
Learned and lewde : he ne let no man stande ;  
That he hitte even, stirred never after.  
Many a lovely ladie and her lemmans of knightes  
Swouned and swelte for sorwe of Death's dyntes.

The earliest authenticated painting of the Death-dance is that which was once to be seen in the churchyard of the Innocents at Paris, painted in A.D. 1434, but it is improbable that it was actually the first. A closely similar theme of earlier date may still be seen in the Campo Santo at Pisa. Vasari attributed it to Andrew Orcagna (A.D. 1329-68), but modern critics believe it to have been painted by Pisan artists, about A.D. 1350. This fresco shows three young men following the chase on horseback. Coming to the cell of St. Macarius, an Egyptian anchorite, they are brought face to face with three open coffins, in which are a skeleton and two dead bodies, reminding them of the fleeting nature of human pleasures. This subject also is one adopted from contemporary literature. Under the title of 'Les trois Morts et les trois Vifs' it had figured in thirteenth-century verse, and is frequently illustrated in the manuscript *Horae* of the period. It is suggested that this legend is the origin of the name 'Danse macabre', or 'Macaber Dance', used often as an alternative name for the familiar 'Dance of Death'.

It is not in Italy and not in France, but rather, as we should expect, in Germany and Switzerland, that these Dances of Death found most favour, as befits the countries that gave

<sup>1</sup> Passus xxiii. 100-5.









birth to Luther and shelter to Calvin. In 1462-3 plague raged fiercely at Lübeck. In the chapel at the east end of the Marienkirche is a much restored 'Dance of Death', dated 1463, and showing the costumes of the period. It is interesting as being considerably older than the more famous Basle Dance.

By far the most celebrated 'Dance of Death' was that painted in a shed in the churchyard of the Dominican convent at Basle. It is believed to have been painted in commemoration of a plague that occurred during the session of the Grand Council of Basle, that lasted from A. D. 1431 to 1443. It has been attributed on insufficient evidence to Holbein. It was destroyed by a riotous mob in A. D. 1806, but relics of the life-size figures, painted in oil, are still to be seen in the Historical Museum at Basle. Engravings of it also exist that record its characters in detail. Holbein did actually paint a 'Dance of Death' in fresco on the walls of the old Whitehall Palace, which was destroyed in the fire of A. D. 1697. It was an appropriate subject for the brush of an artist, who himself was to die of plague (A. D. 1554). It is probably referred to by Matthew Prior in his *Ode to the Memory of George Villiers* :

Our term of life depends not on our deed,  
Before our birth our funeral was decreed,  
Nor aw'd by foresight, nor misled by chance,  
Imperious death directs the ebon lance,  
Peoples great Henry's tombs, and leads up Holbein's Dance.

Holbein was almost certainly also the author of the originals of the Lyons 'Dance of Death', from which Hans Lutzenberger engraved the woodcuts, which represent a varied assortment of characters of each and every social order, among whom Death, in grotesque guise, plies his grim and gruesome task.

The most casual observer cannot fail to be struck in any collection of pictures of the Holbein School, with the number



that present some aspect or other of death. In the small picture gallery of Basle there is a picture of two skulls and a tibia, by Ambrose Holbein: a diptych, with the bust of a young man on one panel, and a skeleton on the other, by Hans Holbein the Younger: another sixteenth-century diptych with a bust of a girl on one panel, and a bust of a skeleton on the other, by an unknown painter: and two pictures by Hans Baldung (A.D. 1475-1545), one of Death holding a woman by the hair and pointing to a grave: the other of Death kissing a woman before an open grave.

Plague banners, or *gonfaloni*,<sup>1</sup> are a characteristic product of the Umbrian school of painting, and particularly of its Perugian branch. It was the lot of Perugian painters to ply their art in the midst of tribulations of every kind. Throughout the fifteenth century their country was devastated by war, and by a succession of epidemics of plague (in A.D. 1399, 1418, 1429, 1437, 1450, 1456, 1460-8, 1475-80 and 1486). In the face of these visitations Perugia set herself to appeal to the mercy of Christ through the medium of her art. All her painters scarcely sufficed to provide all the banners required for her expiatory and triumphal processions. It was at times such as these that the *gonfaloni* made their appearance, raised between heaven and earth, as though to convey to God a splendid manifestation of popular repentance. Before the suppliant banners marched the priesthood in their robes, behind them followed a penitent people, striking their breasts and wailing aloud *Misericordia*. At each fresh invasion of plague a new generation of artists, beginning with Bonfigli (A.D. 1420-96) and ending with Baroccio (A.D. 1528-1612), was called upon to produce afresh these tributes of the popular devotion. The remedy was well adapted to their sufferings, for these processions of penitents, traversing the city and following banners, that

<sup>1</sup> Rio, *L'Art chrétien*; and Crawford, *Proceedings of Roy. Soc. of Med.*, 1913, vol. vi, pp. 37-48.

displayed the figure of the Redeemer, or the Madonna, or some other plague saint, produced in their souls such a degree of spiritual exaltation, as made despondency impossible. Men gazed on them as they gazed on the Brazen Serpent that Moses set up in the wilderness. A striking banner is that by Bonfigli, in the church of S. Fiorenzo at Perugia, painted in A.D. 1476 during an epidemic of plague. Above kneels the Madonna : before her stands the Child in a basket of roses upheld by angels, wearing chaplets of roses, as in most of Bonfigli's pictures. Both Madonna and Child are crowned. Below kneel groups of citizens, men and women, with Sebastian and other saints, supplicating the Madonna. An angel holds a scroll, on which is inscribed a fervid call to repentance, blended with fierce denunciation of their sins, in these words of Lorenzo Spirti :

' Oh, most obstinate and wicked people—cruel, proud, and full of all iniquity, who have placed your faith and your desires on things, which are full of a mortal misery, I, the angel of Heaven, am sent unto you from God to tell you, that He will put an end to all your wounds and weeping, your ruin and your curse through the mediation of Mary. . . . Turn, turn your eyes, most miserable mortals, to the great examples of the past and present, to the utter miseries and heavy evils, which Heaven sends to you because of all your sins : your homicide and your adultery, your avarice and luxury. . . . Oh miserable beings, the justice of heaven works not in a hurry, but it punishes always, even as men deserve. . . . Nineveh was a city florid and magnificent, and Babylon was likewise, but now they are as nothing : and Sodom and Gomorrah, behold them now—a morass of sulphur and of fetid waters. . . . Oh, therefore, be grateful and acknowledge the benefits and graces of our Saviour, and let your souls burn hotly with the fire of faith and charity, of hope and faithful love. . . . But and if you should again grow slothful and unwilling to renounce your errors, I foretell a second judgement upon you, and I reckon that it will prove more terrible, more cruel than the first.' <sup>1</sup>

In banners such as this the imagination of the painter

<sup>1</sup> Duff Gordon, *Story of Perugia* (translation).



finds play for the crowding emotions not of his own heart only, but of the hearts of his fellow citizens as well.

Another type of plague banner is that of the 'Madonna della Misericordia' in the church of S. Francesco del Prato at Perugia, also by Bonfigli. It bears the date A.D. 1464. In the centre stands the crowned Madonna, a majestic figure erect like a lighthouse amid the storm, on which sufferers may fix their eyes and hope. On her garment lie broken arrows, while beneath its ample folds kneel groups of monks on one side, and of nuns on the other, all in attitudes of prayer. In the upper part of the picture Christ, wearing both crown and cruciferous nimbus, casts arrows down. At His right hand is the angel of justice with sword drawn, at His left the angel of mercy with sheathed sword. Gathered around the Madonna and craving her intercession are S. Lorenzo and the Bishop SS. Severo, Costanzo, and Ludovico. Beneath these to the right SS. Francis and Bernardino, and to the left S. Peter Martyr and S. Sebastian, whose body is pierced with many arrows. These saints have Perugia in their special keeping. At the foot of the picture is shown the city of Perugia, with its emblematic griffin on the wall. Within the walls a white-robed confraternity is kneeling in prayer. Without them lurks Death, a bat-winged skeleton with bow and arrows, whose victims strew the ground. But the prayers have prevailed, and already the archangel Raphael strikes Death with his spear. In the foreground outside the walls is a fugitive family, the mother mounted on a donkey, carrying her infants in its paniers. At a side gate two soldiers make off in haste, as the porter tells them the state of the city. Perugians say that not Bonfigli but an angel painted the face of the Madonna. They might well have said it of the exquisite 'Madonna del Soccorso' in Sinibaldo Ibi's plague banner of A.D. 1482 in the church of S. Francisco at Montone. This fancy of the protecting Madonna, spreading her robes

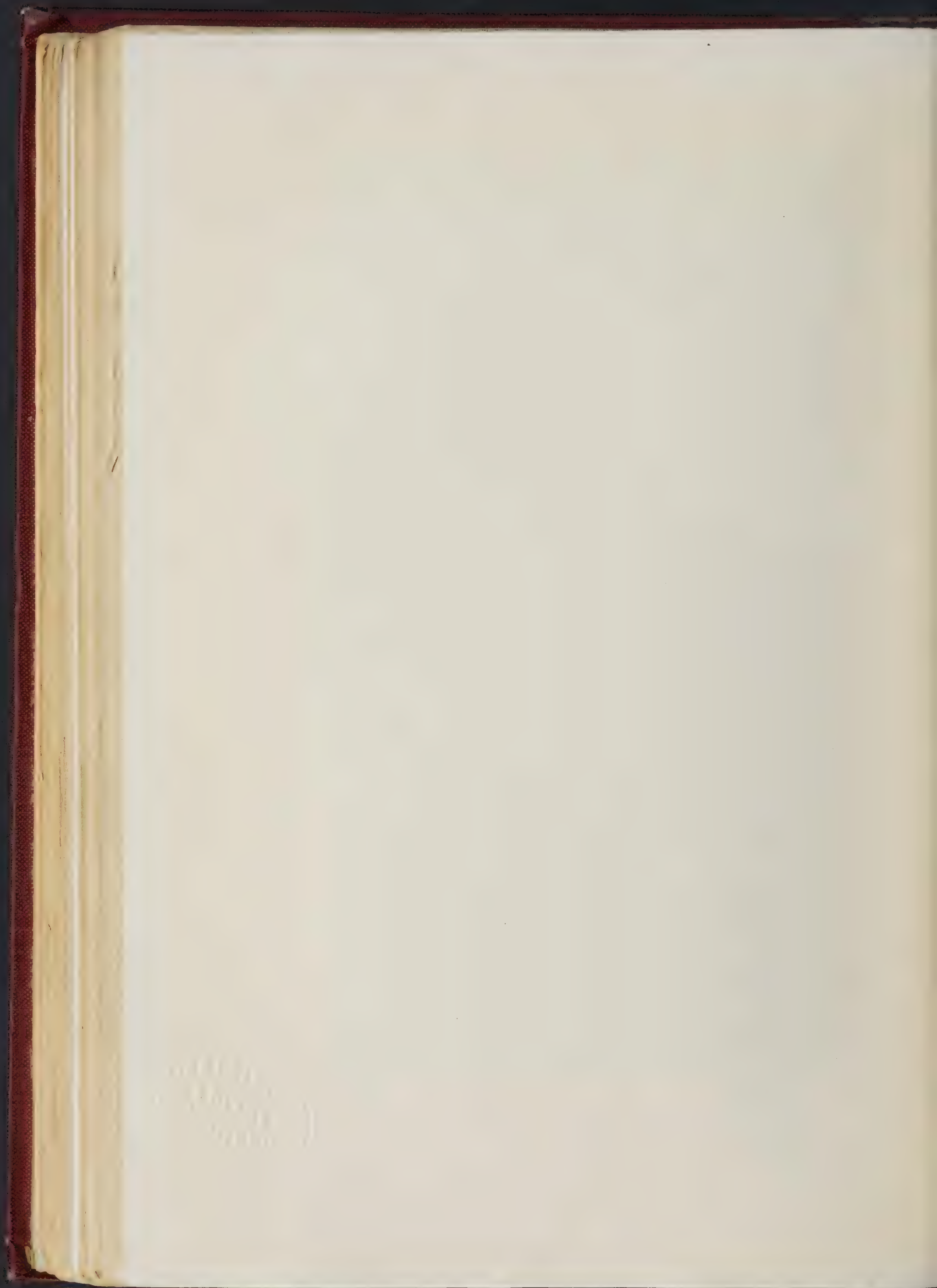




MADONNA DELLA MISERICORDIA  
BY BONFIGLI

Photograph by Alinari, Rome





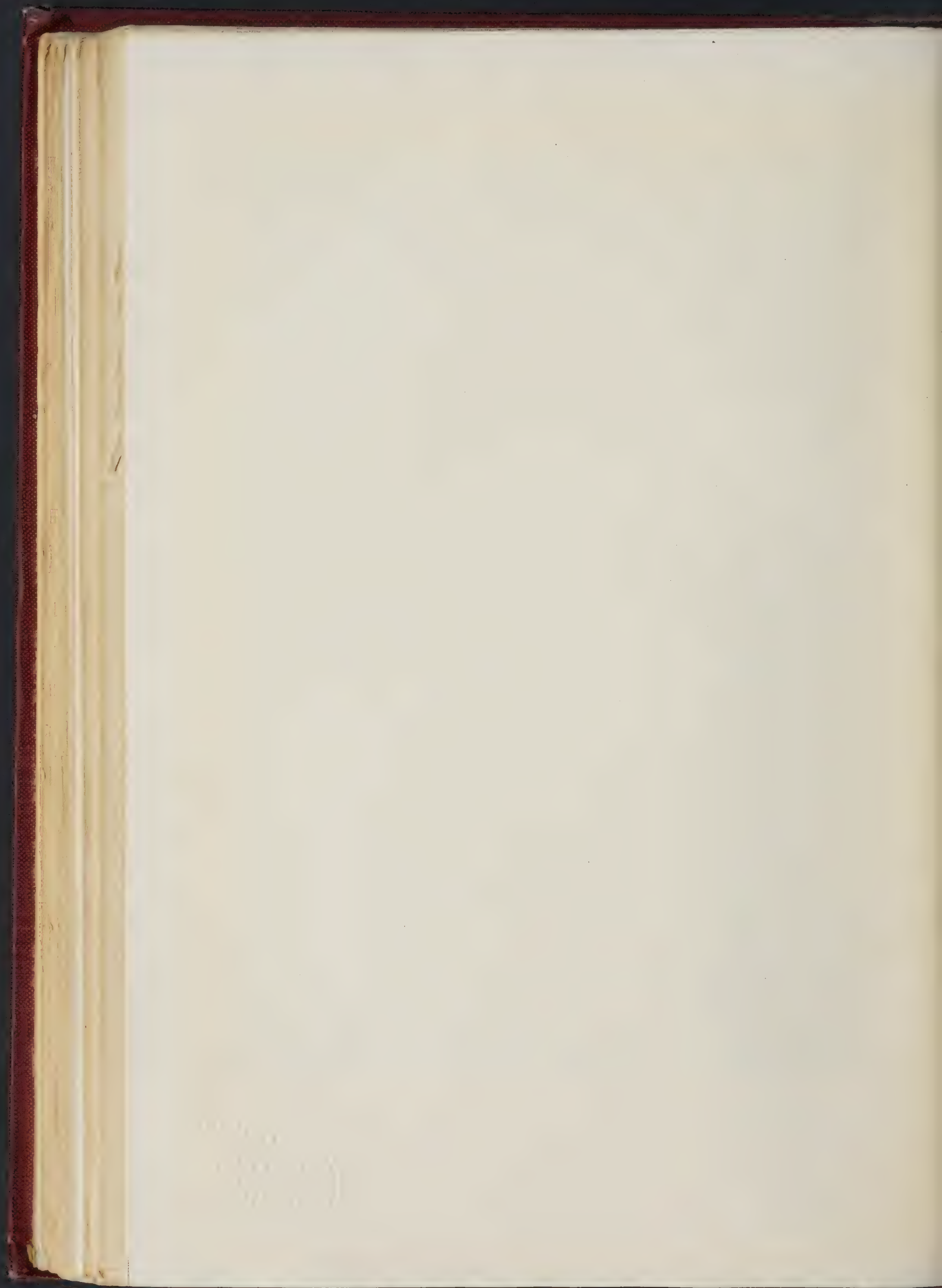




MADONNA DEL SOCCORSO. BY SINIBALDO DEL PIOMBO

Photograph by Alinari, Rome











PLAGUE BANNER. CHRIST AND  
SAINTS. BY BONFIGLI

Photograph by Anderson, Rome



over her suppliants, as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, is borrowed from Hebrew poetry. It figures in a similar conception in the language of the ninety-first Psalm: 'I will say unto the Lord, Thou art my hope and my stronghold: my God, in Him will I trust. For He shall deliver thee from the snare of the hunter, and from the noisome pestilence. He shall defend thee under His wings, and thou shalt be safe under His feathers.'

One more Madonna banner calls for passing notice—that of Bonfigli at Corciano near Perugia, dated 1472. It has the same general character as his 'Madonna della Misericordia'. The quaint head-gear of the angels supporting her robe is the rose-wreath, symbolic of the Madonna, which appears, in one form or another, in so many of her pictures.

In nearly all these banners, as in other archaic works, the dwindling size of individual figures indicates the lesser parts they have to play. In many the Madonna fills almost all the banner's surface.

In another of Bonfigli's banners in the church of S. Maria Nuova at Perugia the figure of Christ, wearing a cruciferous nimbus, dominates the picture. He holds the arrows of pestilence ready to be launched among the people. His face is sad and regretful, as He executes faithfully the behests of His Father. On either side of Him saints bear the emblems of the Passion, and to the right and left are the darkened sun and moon. Beside Him kneel the Madonna and the Franciscan S. Paulinus. In the lowest part of the picture are the chimneys and towers of Perugia, with the pest-fiend, in the semblance of a huge bat, bearing a scythe, and the Angel of Deliverance smiting him with his lance. Below, shepherded by S. Benedict and S. Scholastica, the diminutive citizens kneel in prayer.

Yet another type of plague banner is that in which the figure of a saint plays the leading rôle. The saint is always



Sebastian, only because in Umbria and Tuscany he was the chief accredited protector against pestilence. The finest example of this type is the S. Sebastian of Sodoma, described above (pp. 100-1).

Plague banners were not the exclusive product of Umbria. Two of the most famous, the S. Sebastian of Sodoma and the Sistine Madonna of Raphael, painted at Siena and Florence respectively, are products of the Tuscan school: but it is only in and around Perugia that they can be found and studied to advantage. The Sistine Madonna, in which the Madonna and Child are attended by S. Sixtus and S. Barbara, was painted during an epidemic of pestilence for the Black Brothers of S. Sisto at Piacenza. No record exists that it was ever actually used for the purpose for which it was painted. Bonfigli, in the spirit of Phidias, had painted 'Mary the Queen of Heaven': Raphael, in the spirit of Praxiteles, had painted 'Mary the Mother of God'. The people wanted a queen and Raphael gave them a peasant woman. They could not see, as Raphael saw, in womanhood the embodiment of gentleness spiritualizing the brute in man. They could not see in motherhood the vision of willing suffering transfigured to joy. It was this reunion of Art with Nature, that dethroned the plague banner from the affections of the common people.

Plague banners of less importance are those by Bonfigli at Civitella Benazzone, by Sinibaldo Ibi in the convent of S. Ubaldo at Gubbio, dated A.D. 1503, by Giannicola Manni in the church of S. Domenico at Perugia, dated A.D. 1525, and by Berto di Giovanni in Perugia Cathedral, dated A.D. 1526. There they will be seen for the most part as framed altar-pieces.

Perugia's greatest painter, Pietro Vannucci, better known as Perugino, perished in the course of one of his city's plagues. Tradition has it that he died denying the Saviour and Madonna, whom his art had done so much to glorify, and that his

body was thrown into a desolate grave beside a wayside oak. His sons searched diligently for their father's body, to lay it in the church of S. Agostino, but in vain, among so many that had perished of the plague. It is, said, however, that a priest found it and buried it under the walls of his church at Fontignano.

The humbler *Pestblätter* seem to have played much the same part in the devotional activities of the individual as did the *gonfaloni* in those of the multitude. They were not exclusively German, but were issued also from the presses of Flanders, the Netherlands, Italy, and more rarely of France as well. Pictorial *Pestblätter* are mostly rough woodcuts or copper-plate engravings, crudely coloured by hand in some cases, and belong chiefly to the last two-thirds of the fifteenth and the first third of the sixteenth centuries. In the character of their subjects they are usually simply devotional, and represent some act of expiation or intercession on behalf of mankind. The three leading types correspond closely to the three types of *gonfaloni* in their subjects :

1. Christ, the suffering Redeemer, on the cross.
2. Intercession by the Virgin Mary or by Christ.
3. Memorials of the martyrdom of special plague saints, such as St. Sebastian, St. Roch, and St. Antony.

And closely allied to this last,

4. Intercession by these special plague saints, or by other saints whose association with plague was more fortuitous and less widely recognized : such were St. Quirinus, St. Adrian, and St. Valentine.

Many of these forms have attached to them some appropriate prayer or invocation. Sometimes the religious element is supplemented by an exposition of hygienic precautions or of remedial measures. Thus a devotional cut comes to be blended with injunctions, usually in verse, as to how to stave off pestilence by isolation, fumigation, washing, or



dietary ; or how to cure it by such measures as bleeding, or plasters to hasten maturation of the buboes.

In addition to these types, a non-pictorial type is met with, nearly akin to the English Broadside, in which the religious purpose has almost or wholly disappeared, and which sets out in uncompromising prose directions of prophylactic or therapeutic character.

*Pestblätter* originated in more ways than one. In times of pestilence pilgrimages were often made to the shrines of special saints, and rough representations of these saints were provided, as memorials of their pilgrimage to the devout. Sometimes the object of homage was some sacred picture, which would then be roughly reproduced as a memento. At other times they seem to have been issued by religious communities for purely devotional purposes. Those of secular character were either printed by order of the municipalities, or were the product of private medical enterprise. Original *Pestblätter* are to be seen in the leading museums of most European countries. A selection of these has been admirably reproduced in a portfolio<sup>1</sup> by Heitz and Mündel of Strasbourg.

Plate XVII (1) is a woodcut, probably printed at Nuremberg at the commencement of the fifteenth century. The Almighty is depicted with the drawn sword of pestilence in His hand, within what would seem from its colouring in the original to be a representation of the rose-wreath, emblematic of the Virgin Mary. In the centre are St. Sebastian with his symbolic arrow, and an angel tending the plague sore of St. Roch. Below is a prayer to these two saints.

Plate XVII (2) shows the Almighty above, with the shafts of pestilence in His hands. The crowned Madonna shelters beneath her robe her suppliants, among whom are dignitaries of the Church. Below a group of saints are interceding with the Virgin and Child and St. Anna. The whole is encircled by the Virgin's girdle wrought into a rose-wreath.

<sup>1</sup> *Pestblätter des xv. Jahrhunderts.*







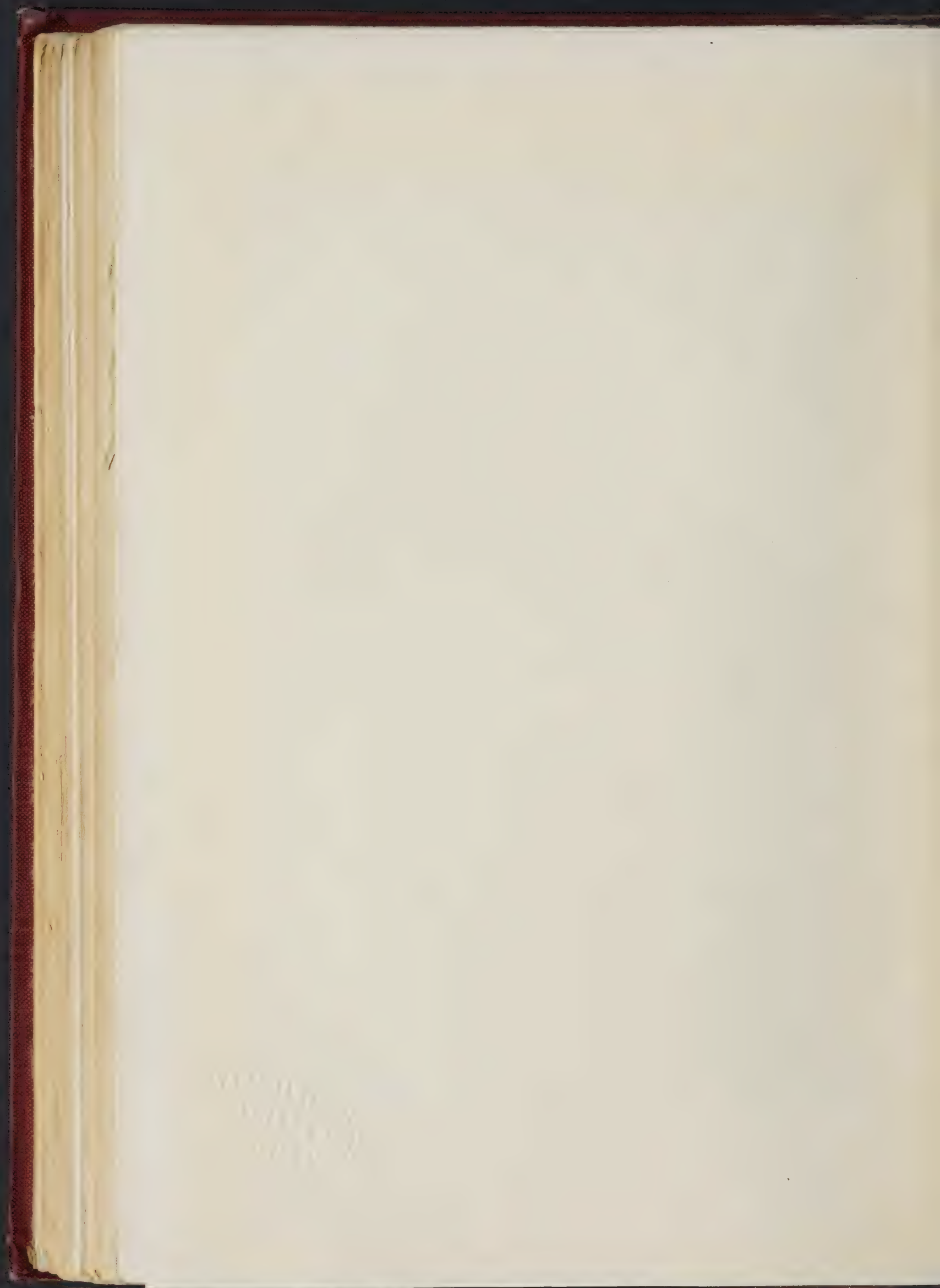
I. THE ALMIGHTY WITH SS. SEBASTIAN  
AND ROCH





2. THE ALMIGHTY, MADONNA AND SUPPLIANTS. THE VIRGIN AND CHILD, S. ANNA AND SUPPLIANTS





St. Anthony is a favourite figure of these *Pestblätter*. He is more closely associated with plague and pestilence in Germany than is the case in Italy. He is also patron-saint against erysipelas, known as St. Anthony's Fire, which often raged in epidemics in pre-Listerian times. He is commonly represented with the cross, on which he was crucified, with a crutch symbolic of his great age and feebleness, and with an exorcising bell. The passing bell was tolled originally not only to ask for prayers for the soul of the departed, but also to scare away evil spirits from it. The pig, that accompanies St. Anthony, is the emblem of the Devil, whose temptings he successfully repelled. Even in the absence of St. Anthony himself, his cross in the form of the Greek T is often introduced, sometimes with Christ nailed upon it. From this association of St. Anthony with the cross, it became customary to appeal to him, as to the crucifix, in times of pestilence.

The association of SS. Quirinus, Adrian, and Valentine of Rufach with plague is purely local and incidental. St. Quirinus was primarily the patron-saint of the gouty, and St. Valentine of the epileptic, so that the name *Veltins Krankheit* was applied to epilepsy. St. Adrian held under his special protection the Flemish brewers, and the more creditable patronage of the plague-stricken was only a later accretion.

A very large number of pictures are designed to commemorate specific plagues, and were painted in fulfilment of vows made to the Madonna and saints for deliverance from plague. Many of these have already been considered in connexion with the legends and cults of SS. Sebastian and Roch, to whom they were dedicated. But in far the larger proportion of these pictures the central figure is the Madonna (see Plates XI and XII). Sometimes she is attended by



SS. Sebastian and Roch, and by other saints as well. The added saints are, as a rule, the special protectors of the city, for which the thank-offering has been vowed. Sometimes they are the patron saints of confraternities, for whom they have been painted. Sometimes the special medical saints, Cosmas and Damian, are appropriately added to the pictures. Examples may be seen in almost any gallery of Italian pictures. In the Brera, Cima de Conigliano (A.D. 1460-1518) has painted the Madonna and Child with St. John the Baptist, St. Sebastian, the Magdalen and St. Roch, the last-named showing an incised wound on the inner side of the right thigh. The character of the picture may be taken as conclusive evidence of its origin and purpose.

Titian's picture in the Vatican shows the Madonna and Child in glory, and St. Sebastian, St. Nicholas, St. Catharine, St. Peter, and St. Francis are the attendant saints. This picture was painted by Titian after the cessation of a plague epidemic at Venice for the Franciscan church of S. Nicolò de Frari.

Correggio's 'Madonna di San Sebastiano', in which she is attended by SS. Sebastian and Roch, with S. Geminiano, the patron saint of Modena, was painted in A.D. 1515 in commemoration of a plague that devastated that city three years previously.

Yet another by Guido Reni (A.D. 1574-1642), in the Academy at Bologna, was painted at the instance of the senate of Bologna, after the plague of A.D. 1630. It was carried in solemn procession through the city to its consecration, and from this circumstance has been called 'Il Pallione del Voto'. The rainbow beneath the Madonna's feet, and the olive branch in the hand of the infant Christ, each signify the return of peace. The attendant saints are the special protectors of Bologna, St. Petronius, St. Francis, St. Dominic, St. Proculus, St. Florian, St. Ignatius and St. Francis Xavier.

Raphael's 'Madonna of Foligno', in the Vatican, has been accounted by some a plague picture on account of its general character, and of the fireball descending on the city of Foligno. Raphael, however, painted the picture in A.D. 1512, the very year in which it is recorded that an aerolite fell into Foligno: the picture probably commemorates the escape of some individual or institution. There was a disastrous plague in Foligno, but not till A.D. 1523, and it has been depicted in a hideous picture by Gaetano Gandolfi of Bologna (A.D. 1734-1802), which is now in the Corsini Palace at Rome.

Miraculous Madonnas abound in Italy, but are, as a rule, of little artistic interest. A pleasing exception is the 'Madonna and Child' that hangs in the tribune of the church of Carmine in Perugia. It was put up to commemorate the deliverance of Perugia from plague at the prayer of the Perugian Carmelites: at each recurrence of plague it was the object of popular adoration. Formerly it was covered with a gauze veil, which caught fire and was destroyed, but the Madonna herself escaped any trace of injury.

The Madonna of Ara Coeli and the Madonna of S. Maria Maggiore are both accredited deliverers from plague and pestilence in Rome.

Florence, too, has her miraculous Madonna in the small village of Impruneta. This dark panel, blackened and perished with the lapse of years, was found, so the legend goes, in the soil at Impruneta, uttering a cry as the workman's spade struck it. Seldom or never exposed to the gaze of the devout, she has suffered the indignity of an exposure at the hands of the omnipresent photographer. In A.D. 1527 plague broke out in Florence in the early summer. On June 2, an enormous festival was celebrated in honour of the Virgin of the Annunciation, that she might be persuaded to succour the Commonwealth in its troubles. But in July and August the mortality rose to 150-200 a



day, and in the autumn to twice these numbers, so that all business was at a standstill, and the city seemed deserted. Then the government determined to have recourse to the Black Virgin of Impruneta, whom the Commonwealth of Florence has invoked so often in various crises of its history. Of her Segni<sup>1</sup> says: 'To this mother of God our city has never publicly applied in vain, in whatever extremity of distress. It is no light or silly thing, which I am here affirming: for in time of drought she ever sent rain: in periods of flood, she has restored to us fine weather: from pestilence she has removed the poison: and in every most grievous ill she has found its appropriate remedy.' So the Black Virgin was brought from Impruneta, and the magistrates of Florence, 'barefooted and in mourning, received her at the gate of the city, and carried her in solemn and very sad procession to the Church of the Servites. Forty thousand citizens had died in the month of November. But the never-failing Virgin of Impruneta prevailed on this occasion also. For with the coming of the cold weather, the sickness began to abate. And thus the faith of the Florentines in their charm was more than ever confirmed.' The Black Virgin still watches over Florence in time of drought. Readers of *Romola* will recall that other stirring procession of the Impruneta Virgin, in which Savonarola strode along defiantly among his company of black and white Dominicans.

Throughout France and Italy numerous pictures may be seen, recording the ministrations of local or locally venerated saints in time of pestilence. Such is Tiepolo's picture in the cathedral at Este, showing St. Tecla liberating Este from plague. Pictures such as this stand midway between the group of votive pictures and the group of actual plague scenes, of which Raphael (A.D. 1483-1520) is the earliest exponent.

<sup>1</sup> Vol. i, Bk. I, and Trollope, *History of Commonwealth of Florence*, vol. iv.



PLATE XVIII (Face Page 146)



THE IMPRUNETA VIRGIN



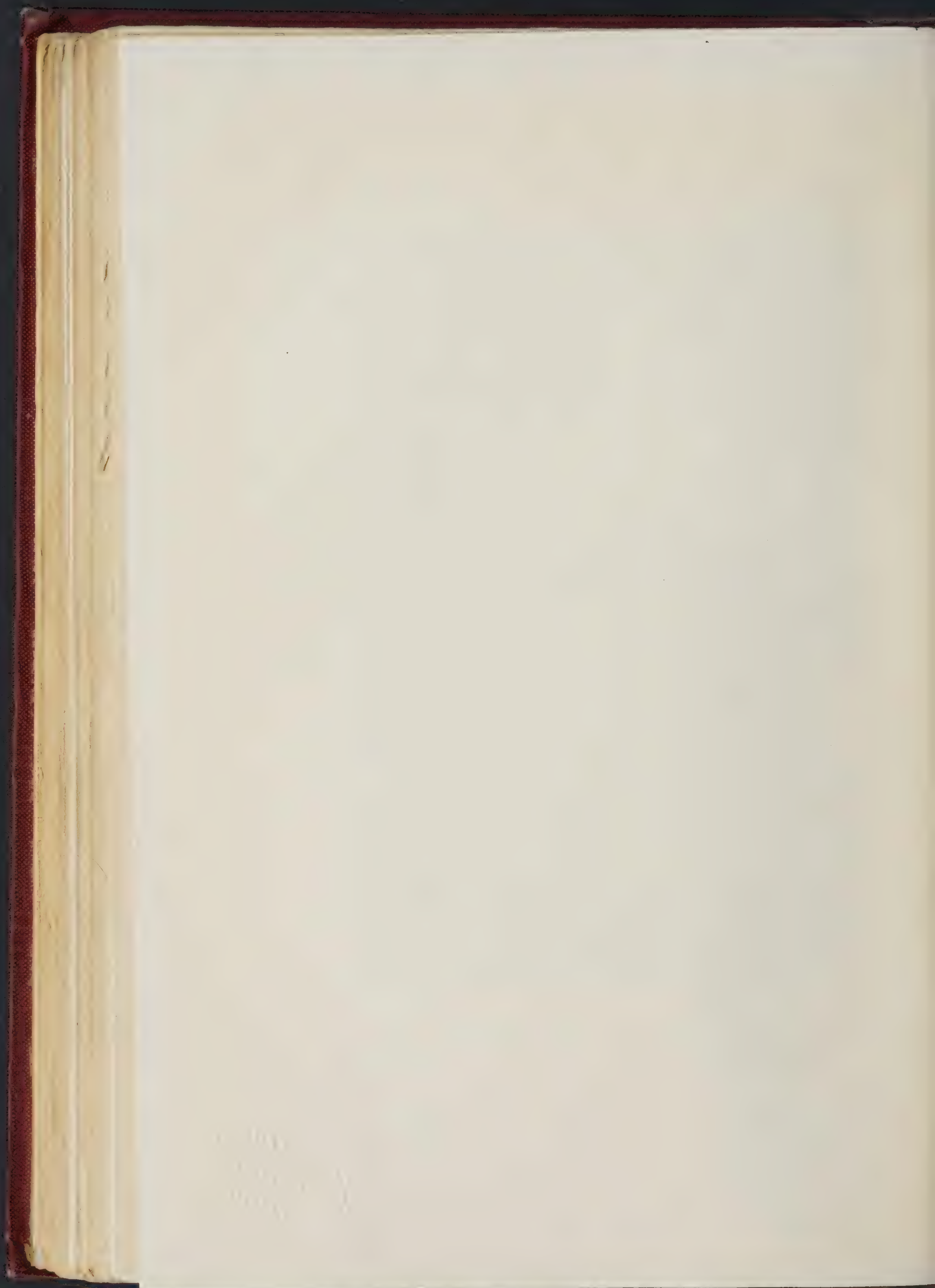








PLATE XIX S. TECLA LIBERATES ESTE FROM PLAGUE  
By Giovanni Battista Tiepolo. Photograph by Naya, Venice (Face Page 147)



Raphael's drawing of 'Plague',<sup>1</sup> now in the Uffizi gallery at Florence, has become much worn with time. The picture is divided into two parts by a head of the god Terminus mounted on a lofty pedestal. To the right it is night-time, but the interior of a house of mourning is shown in vertical section. In its courtyard is a young man, with a torch in his right hand, counting the number of stricken animals, while with his left he prevents one of the sheep from coming near to those that are dead. An ewe lies dead with a young lamb fastened to her dried-up udder. An ox lying down surveys the scene sadly. Above this corpse-strewn court a stream of light, penetrating into the interior of a room, illumines the figures of two Sisters of Charity, as they minister to the master of the house, who is dying: he is stretched on his bed, lying in a dense shadow—the shadow of impending death. He seems to turn away from them and to reject their help.

In the other part of the picture it is day, and daylight shows up everywhere scenes of suffering, death, and desolation. In the foreground lies the body of a woman stretched out in death, while her child struggles to reach her ice-cold breast. The father bends down hastily to hold the child away, and, as he does so, covers his nose and mouth with his hand, to keep out the contagion of the pestilence. Behind this group an older woman turns away in horror: before it, an old man buries his face in his hands against the plinth of the statue in an anguish of sorrow, while a young man makes off in panic. In the background broken columns and the dead body of a horse serve to intensify the desolation of the scene.

Raphael's rendering of the scene, for all the horror of its details, serves rather to inspire pity than horror. He holds the balance evenly between the horrible realities of the plague and the redeeming spirituality of human nature.

<sup>1</sup> Gruyer, *Raphaël et l'Antiquité*.



Compassion and suffering stand side by side. The ox pities his kind passively, as the Sisters seek to minister actively to their kind. In the features and attitude of the child Raphael has depicted the devotion that does not die with death. The deepest note of pathos is touched in the form of the old man in the centre of the picture, whose grey hairs are brought down in sorrow to the grave.

It has been asserted that Raphael's rendering of the dead mother and the child was inspired by an actual record of Ambroise Paré, but as Paré was only born three years before Raphael died, the statement falls to the ground.

Raphael's debt seems to go back as far as to Aristides of Thebes, who flourished about 340 B.C. Pliny<sup>1</sup> mentions a picture by him, which so impressed Alexander the Great, at the sack of Thebes, that he took it for himself, and ordered that it should be sent to Pella. According to Pliny, the picture represented a wounded mother lying at the point of death, and her infant child creeping to her breast. Fear is written in the expression of her face, lest the child should draw blood from her breast, now that her milk is dry.

Raphael's drawing has been engraved by Marco Antonio Raimondi under the name of 'Il Morbetto'. In Delaborde's *Marc-Antoine Raimondi* it is reproduced under the name 'La Peste de Phrygie', because on the pedestal are inscribed the words of Vergil :

Linquebant dulces animas aut aegra trahebant corpora.<sup>2</sup>

Vergil, in this brief description of pestilence, aims at no more than mere poetic effect. It is introduced only to fill up the cup of trouble for the Trojan wanderers, and is compressed into a few lines. The Trojan fleet had just made the land : Aeneas had laid the foundations of a new town, and Ilium was to live again in Pergamus. Then the plague broke out.

<sup>1</sup> *Nat. Hist.*, lib. xxxv.

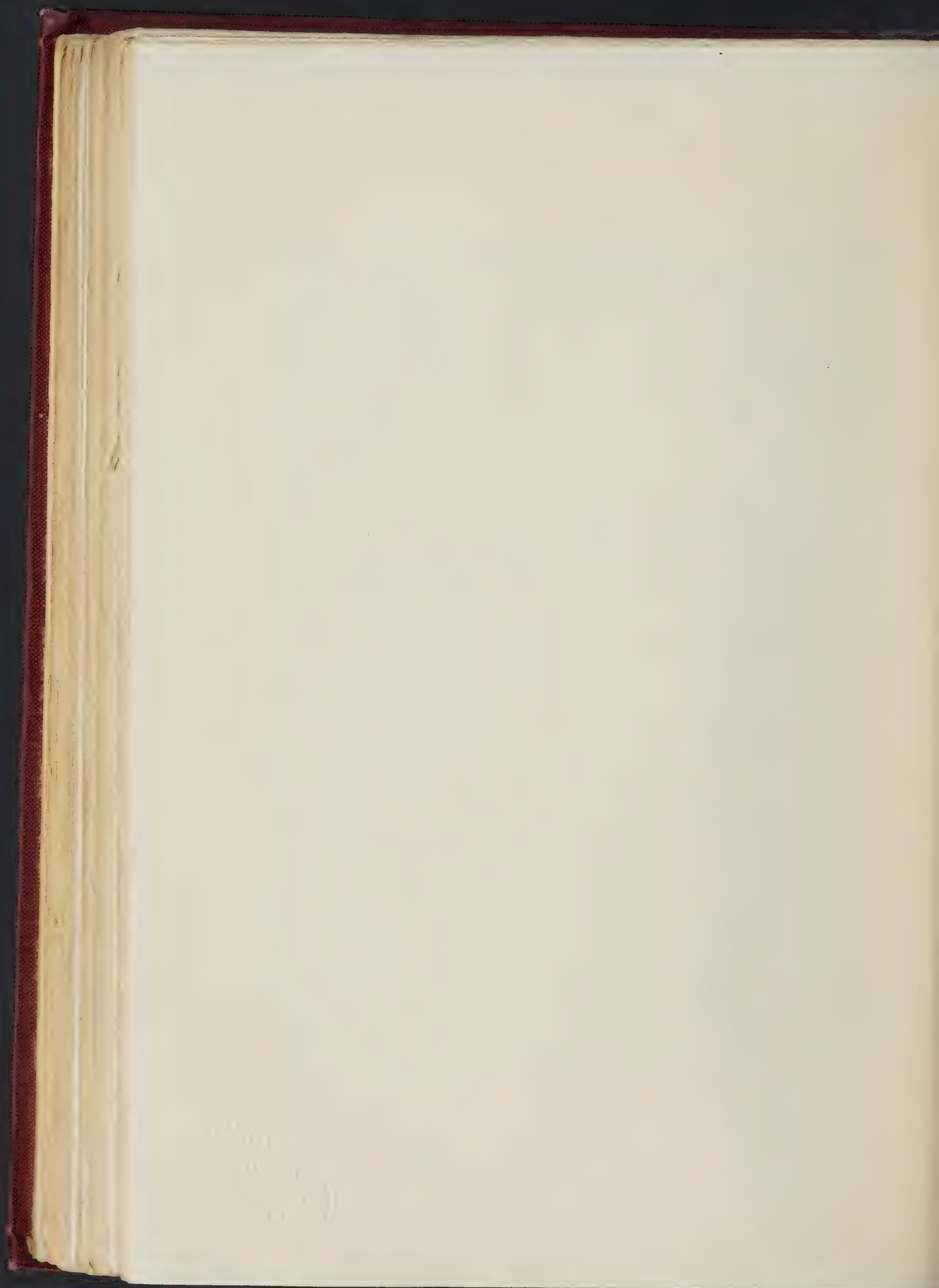
<sup>2</sup> *Aeneid*, iii. 140.





PLATE XX    PLAGUE. A DRAWING BY RAPHAEL    (Face Page 148)





Iamque fere sicco subductae littore puppes;  
 Connubiis arvisque novis operata iuventus,  
 . . . . . subito cum tabida membris,  
 corrupto caeli tractu, miserandaque venit  
 arboribusque satisque lues et letifer annus.  
 linquebant dulces animas aut aegra trahebant  
 corpora; tum steriles exurere Sirius agros;  
 arebant herbae, et victum seges aegra negabat.

Scarce stand the vessels hauled upon the beach,  
 And bent on marriages the young men vie  
 To till new settlements, while I to each  
 Due law dispense and dwelling place supply.  
 When from a tainted quarter of the sky  
 Rank vapours, gathering, on my comrades seize,  
 And a foul pestilence creeps down from high  
 On mortal limbs and standing crops and trees,  
 A season black with death, and pregnant with disease.

Sweet life from mortals fled: they drooped and died.  
 Fierce Sirius scorched the fields, and herbs and grain  
 Were parched, and food the wasting crops denied.

(FAIRFAX TAYLOR.)

As it stands, this is an outline sketch of a famine pestilence, which Raphael had no intention of depicting, when he adopted the line. Surely Sisters of Charity would not figure in a Phrygian plague, some thousand years before Christ!

Besides pictures, a few medals exist commemorative of plagues prior to the sixteenth century: these were sometimes struck as mediums of spiritual consolation. Frequent devices on these were representations of Christ on the Cross, or of a Serpent on a pole. The specimen figured here (Plate I (4)) is a Wittenberg thaler of 1528. It shows these two devices on the opposite faces of the medal, each with a descriptive legend.

The fifteenth century had drawn to a close in Italy amid a confusion of epidemics. Pintor, the personal physician of Pope Alexander VI, has left a book in which he says that the *morbis Gallicus* first appeared at Rome in March 1493 and had claimed numerous victims by the August following.



Then, after an inundation of the Tiber in December 1495, plague broke out fiercely in Rome. Pintor states that the touch of certain precious stones was vaunted as a specific. In 1493 plague was raging also at Genoa and Naples. At the latter city the mortality amounted to 20,000 souls. A Genoese chronicler, Seneraga, attributes the outbreak at Genoa to pollution of the shore by the dead bodies of the Jews, who had sought sanctuary there on their expulsion from Spain in 1492, but had died of starvation on the outskirts of the inhospitable city. Jewish writers asserted that there was plague in Spain, and that it was carried by the fugitives in their ships to Italy. Most of the expelled Jews found shelter from the persecution of the Cross under the protection of the Crescent, in Constantinople, Salonica, the Levant, and Northern Africa. It was this far-reaching epidemic that drove Charles VIII of France out of Florence, Rome, and Naples in succession, almost as soon as his army had entered them.

## CHAPTER IX

THROUGHOUT the sixteenth century plague epidemics follow each other in almost unbroken succession throughout Central Europe. In Rome alone, during this century, there were no less than twelve severe outbreaks. The archives of the Capitol and the registers of contemporary notaries<sup>1</sup> abound in scattered information concerning these visitations. It had become an established custom that at the first appearance of an epidemic the Pope and his court should escape from Rome to a place of safety, leaving the municipality to provide for the situation as best it could. In May 1449, Nicholas V had fled into Umbria : in 1462, Pius II had fled successively to Viterbo, Bolsena, and Corsignano. In 1476, Sixtus IV had flitted in like manner from place to place. So in April 1522, at the height of the epidemic, it seemed only in accordance with precedent, when Adrian VI from his secure seclusion in Spain sent word to Rome of the necessity of imposing a fresh tax for supporting a crusade against the Turks. The Cardinals seem to have desired to emulate the example of Adrian, for in June the Town Council asked the Sacred College not to forsake their posts. Deserted by their spiritual leaders, the populace lent a ready ear to the imposture of the Greek necromancer Demetrius of Sparta. He persuaded the terrified people that the plague was the work of demons, and that, by appeasing them, it might be brought to an end. So he paraded the streets of the city, leading by a silken cord a bull that he professed to have tamed by spells, and sacrificed it in the Colosseum with full pagan ritual to the hostile demons. As soon as the clergy realized the enormity of the sacrilege they had condoned

<sup>1</sup> Lanciani, *Golden Days of the Renaissance*.



they instituted a penitential procession, which marched through the city, scourging themselves to bleeding and crying *Misericordia*. If we may credit Paolo Giovio, chief physician to Clement VII (A.D. 1523-34), it was neither prayer nor sacrifice that put an end to the plague, but a wonderful oil invented by Gregorio Caravita, a physician from Bologna. The Oratorio del Crocifisso, near the church of S. Marcello, is said to have been erected in expiation of this event. This plague lingered on at least till the following year, A.D. 1523, for Benvenuto Cellini<sup>1</sup> records his experience of it in some detail. He says that it dragged on for months, and that several thousands died daily in Rome. In not unnatural apprehension on his own account, he determined to adopt such amusements as would promote cheerfulness of mind, which many believed to be the best remedy against infection. So he betook himself to shooting pigeons among the ancient monuments of Rome, and found the pursuit so beneficial to his health that he succeeded in staving off for a long time the plague, to which many of his comrades succumbed. But somewhat later, after spending the night with a young serving girl, he himself fell a victim and has recorded his initial sensations as follows :

‘ I rose upon the hour of breaking fast, and felt tired, for I had travelled many miles that night, and was wanting to take food, when a crushing headache seized me : several boils appeared upon my left arm, together with a carbuncle which showed itself just beyond the palm of the left hand, where it joins the wrist. Everybody in the house was in a panic : my friend, the cow [Faustina] and the calf [the serving girl] all fled. Left alone there with my poor little prentice, who refused to abandon me, I felt stifled at the heart, and made up my mind for certain I was a dead man.’

By the constant ministrations of a male friend and the help of a physician, whom the apprentice summoned, Benvenuto threw off the sickness, but while the bubo was

<sup>1</sup> Bk. I, § 27 seq.

still open and plugged with lint under a covering of plaster, went out riding on a little wild pony. Benvenuto's account is valuable as the record of the personal sensations and sufferings of a plague-stricken man, and tells us also something of the treatment to which he was subjected at the hands of sixteenth-century medicine.

Benvenuto says that the joyous reunion of the survivors, after the plague was over, led to the formation by one Michael Agnolo, a sculptor, of a club of all the leading painters, sculptors, and goldsmiths in Rome. The meetings of the club, to judge from his descriptions, seem to have been devoted to merrymaking rather than to artistic discourse. On his return to Florence he found that his father and most of his household were dead, and his surviving sister Liparata, believing him to have died at Rome, swooned at sight of him. But under the mellowing influence of supper, at which weddings were the main topic of conversation, sorrow speedily gave place to gaiety.

Marselius Galeati of Padua at the beginning of the fifteenth century had drawn up the first known code of 'Regulations against the Plague', based on the belief that the disease was imported to Italy by foreign commerce.

From the records of the city of Rome it is possible to gather some idea of the measures adopted by the Popes and Town Council for the suppression of epidemics of plague. There isolation of infected individuals or districts was attempted. All wearing apparel and other materials and articles capable of spreading the infection, were liable to be destroyed. The city gates were closed, and every incomer was subjected to strict inspection, and was frequently rejected. Those gates that were left open could only be used from daybreak to nightfall, when they were locked against all comers. Navigation of the Tiber was sometimes suppressed; Lanciani says that an order was issued on July 30, 1575, that all the boats on the Tiber should be scuttled in three days, because



it was found that the boatmen were ferrying passengers across stream for bribes. Two transgressors were actually put to the rack for their offence, which was placarded over them for all to read. On one occasion a wholesale destruction of dried fish was taken in hand. Contract medical practice seems to have existed even in these days. Lanciani has noted among the city records agreements between physicians or quacks and Roman families for the provision of medical advice and drugs for a stipulated payment of money. Wills were often dictated from windows, while lawyer and witnesses stood in the street beneath.

Confraternities for ministering to the sick and removing them to the hospitals existed in Rome, though perhaps numerically less than in other great cities of Italy. The confraternity of the *Pietà* had been instituted during a plague epidemic, in the time of Eugene IV (1431-47), and still has a nominal existence in Rome.

Plague broke out fiercely again in Rome in 1527, at the time of the sack of the city. Florence was also involved in this same epidemic. It is this visitation that gave birth to Machiavelli's *Descrizione della Peste di Firenze dell' anno 1527*, cast in the form of a letter to a friend. In it we find no vivid picture of the awful catastrophe that was overwhelming Florence, but in place of that a cold-blooded cynical record of the trivial doings of a loafer sauntering idly through the streets of the plague-stricken city. It is a record that challenges comparison rather with the casual entries of *Pepys's Diary*, than with the formal descriptions of Bocaccio and Manzoni, his own compatriots. Opening with a vapid soulless lamentation, in the vein of Petrarch, over the general demoralization and devastation produced by the plague, he passes on to describe his own daily mode of living, from which his correspondent is invited to infer that of the general body of citizens. The *liaisons* of licentious monks, the vile ribaldry of infamous buriers, the vain recourse

to preservatives against the plague, these are the things that are uppermost in his mind, as he depicts his own amorous intrigues against the dark background of the plague, with the fidelity of a Pepys and the light-hearted insouciance of a Guy de Maupassant.

Villari, Macaulay, and others have declined to accept the *Descrizione* as an authentic product of Machiavelli's pen. They cannot reconcile its garrulous obscenity with the stern cold-blooded restraint of the author of the *Principe*—the frivolity of the one with the sinewy manhood of the other. They seem to forget that, so far back as 1502, amid the stirring life of the camp of Caesar Borgia, he had found leisure to write similar puerilities to his friends in Florence. Political rectitude, or if we may not ascribe this to Machiavelli, political sagacity is no guarantee of moral righteousness, and sensuality is not the exclusive property of the young. Moral levity, as the history of pestilence shows, is a usual product of the constant imminence of danger and death; and with Machiavelli political degradation had left moral levity in sole possession of the field.

A copy of the discredited production still actually exists in the handwriting of Machiavelli, with revisions inserted in the manuscript in that of his friend Lorenzo di Filippo Strozzi. Villari advances the strange suggestion, that Machiavelli had merely copied out what Strozzi had composed. Is it not equally reasonable to suppose that Machiavelli had used an actual letter of Strozzi, as the basis of a casual composition? This would explain the fact that it is cast in epistolary form, as well as the apparent discrepancy of style. Francesco Berni (c. 1490–1536), a contemporary of Machiavelli, has apostrophized plague in one of his satirical poems or *capitoli*. A cleric, to whom indolent pleasure was the be-all and end-all of existence, he must surely stand alone among writers as one who would hug the pestilence to him as a friend.



'The pestilence time is good—a fig for other times. . . . Firstly, it carries off the rabble, it destroys them, makes holes among them and thins them out—like a housewife among the geese at Allhallowtide! In the churches there are none to press upon you. Besides, none keep any record of buying or borrowing. Yea, buy and make debts, for there will be no creditors to trouble you. And if a creditor should come, tell him that your head aches, that your arm pricks, he straight will go away, and will not turn him round! If you go out, no one will cross your path: rather is place yielded to you, and honour done you, especially if you are clothed in rags. You are lord of yourself and lord of others. You can watch the folk's strange antics and laugh at others' fear. Life has then new laws: every pleasure is allowed. . . . Above all, there need be no work done. It is a choice life, serene and large: time passes very gaily from dinner time to supper.'<sup>1</sup>

In A.D. 1530 there was plague in Geneva,<sup>2</sup> which is memorable as the occasion of an accusation against certain persons of disseminating the disease by means of concocted poisons. In the spring of the year a dissolute young man, one Michael Caddod, was seen to throw down a handkerchief near a shop. Some one picked it up, and its foul smell aroused suspicion. Caddod was forthwith put to torture, and in his agony implicated Jean Placet, an unqualified surgeon in charge of the pest-house, together with his wife, son, and servant, and one Dom Jehan Dufour, priest and confessor to the pest-house. Under the influence of torture, they were driven to admit, that they had sworn solemnly on a Book of Hours to join in spreading the plague, so as to enable them to pillage the sick. Placet and his wife, they said, had prepared the poison from poultices that had been used on discharging buboes, by drying them to powder and then adding veratrum. Caddod and his wife undertook to spread it about the streets, while Placet and his wife administered it to patients in the pest-house with promptly

<sup>1</sup> Translated by Miss Egerton Castle, *Italian Literature*.

<sup>2</sup> Léon Gautier, *La Médecine à Genève jusqu'à la fin du dix-huitième siècle*.

fatal results. Suspicion fell on Placet, and a barber-surgeon, Bastian Granger, with his assistant, was instructed to keep an eye on his doings. Madame Placet was equal to the occasion and gave the pair short shrift with a dose of poison in their food. In the end Placet and Caddod were convicted. Their hands were first cut off in front of the houses of their supposed victims. Next their flesh was cruelly lacerated with red-hot pincers, and finally the headsman's axe put a merciful end to their sufferings. Young Placet's age obtained for him the lenient treatment of hanging, while Dufour was first unfrocked and then hanged. A rapid decline of the plague ensued on so acceptable a sacrifice.

A few years later, in January 1545, a recurrence of plague in Geneva raised anew the phantom of another plague plot. This time the bailiff ordered the arrest of the two men, Bernard Dallinge and Jehan Lentille. They were alleged to have cut off the foot of a corpse that had fallen from the gallows, and used it as an ingredient of a plague ointment that they smeared on the handles of doors. By March, confessions extracted from them by torture had served to implicate no less than forty persons. All were accused of having sworn to spread the disease broadcast, and of having actually smeared door-handles and locks. When searched, boxes of ointment were found in their possession. The craze for carrying antipestilential remedies made this an easy matter, but for all that their guilt was manifest. Calvin, in a letter of March 27, 1545, addressed to Myconius, seems to credit their guilt, but the State records of Geneva show that he mercifully advocated strangling instead of mutilation and the stake. As in the case of Servetus, he was less concerned about their deaths than the manner of their dying. Nineteen men and seven women—Catholics perhaps—profited by his clemency, and were executed without preliminary torture. The *Nuremberg Chronicle* says that in 1494 all the beggars were driven



out of Nuremberg, because they were believed to spread the plague.

The leaders of medicine were no more exempt than the people from the promptings of fanatical fear. Ambroise Paré<sup>1</sup> echoes the crude suspicions that Guy de Chauliac had expressed at the time of the Black Death. This is his advice to the magistrates in time of pestilence: 'What shall I add? They must keep an eye on certain thieves, murderers, poisoners, worse than inhuman, who grease and smear the walls and doors of rich houses with matter from buboes and carbuncles and other excretions of the plague-stricken, so as to infect the houses and thus be enabled to break into them, pillage and strip them, and even strangle the poor sick in their beds: which was done at Lyons in the year 1565. God! what punishment such fellows deserve: but this I leave to the discretion of the magistrates, who have charge of such duties.'

Paré recommended, as a prophylactic, the wearing of an amulet of arsenic. It was to be worn over the heart in order that 'the heart might become accustomed to poison, and so be the less injured when other poisons sought it'.

The pandemic of A.D. 1565 was the occasion of a great impetus to the production of the so-called Mystery and Miracle plays, particularly in the south-east parts of France. Mystery plays aimed for the most part at setting forth the central mysteries of the New Testament, such as the Incarnation, the Nativity, the Passion, and the Redemption. Miracle plays dealt with the legends of the great saints of the Church, but in practice the distinction of Miracle and Mystery came to be ignored in the play. The purpose of each, in time of plague, was to appease an angered God by glorifying His majesty, either directly or through the medium of His saints. The origin and prime purpose of these plays had almost certainly been educational, for the instruction of a populace

<sup>1</sup> *Livre de la Peste.*

unable to read for themselves : and they originated out of the worship of the Christian Church. Christianity, when adopted as the State religion, had dealt the death-blow to the vicious spectacles of the amphitheatre that were all that survived of the ancient classical drama. Christianity was also destined to become the parent of the modern drama, by the introduction into public worship, not later than the fifth century A. D., of living pictures to illustrate and expound its teaching. Mystery and Miracle plays alike were evolved from this simple liturgical origin. The transformation had been effected at any rate as early as the twelfth century, and by A. D. 1380 a complete Miracle play was produced in the presence of Charles IV.

Successive epidemics of plague had led to the adoption of these plays as instruments of intercession, and the pandemic of 1565 gave a great impetus to this development. When the district of Maurienne was in the grip of the plague in 1564, the people vowed to present in the following year the Miracle play of their patron saint St. Martin, if only their town were spared. No less than seventy-four actors, all drawn from the working class, devoted themselves to learning and rehearsing the various parts of the play. Money as well as time was freely afforded, for the people themselves undertook the expenses of staging, scenery, and music. The marginal notes of the play, which has been recently published, show that the stage was erected beside the wall of a church. Later, as the control of the performances passed out of the hands of the Church into those of lay associations, the plays came to be performed away from the churches, a separation that paved the way for the secularization of the drama by the introduction of a non-religious atmosphere. This play is in dialect and arranged for presentation on two days. At the first performance the central theme was the life of St. Martin as a soldier, at the second his life as a bishop, and with it were shown certain of his miraculous cures.



This play is but one of many that have recently been published : other towns followed the example of St. Martin de la Porte. Villard-le-Lans vowed and played the 'Mystery of the Passion' and the 'Miracle of Saint Sebastian': Modane the 'Mystery of the Last Judgement': Termignan and Sollières the 'Miracle of Saint Laurence', and so on. Local authors, commonly the priest or the notary, compiled the various plays.

At Villard-le-Lans is a chapel of St. Sebastian. It has no windows, and a doorway hewn in the rock. It was prepared as a theatre for presenting a Mystery play in A.D. 1446. But following the plague of 1565 it was converted, in fulfilment of a rich man's vow, into a chapel adorned with frescoes illustrating the story of St. Sebastian. The frescoes survive to this day, and have been fully described by M. l'Archiviste de Jussin.

If we may credit local legend, the Oberammergau Passion Play had a similar origin in A.D. 1633. One Gaspard Schueler, a native of Oberammergau, but living at Eschenlohe, where plague was rife, determined to pay a hasty and surreptitious visit to his wife and children. He did so, and carried the plague to Oberammergau, where he died of it himself. Between the day of his death and the festival of SS. Simon and Jude, thirty-three days later, eighty-four persons died of plague at Oberammergau. A meeting of the inhabitants was summoned, and six women and twelve men took a solemn vow to produce every ten years a play representing the sufferings of Christ. They were rewarded by the immediate cessation of the plague.

## CHAPTER X

THROUGHOUT the fourteenth and two succeeding centuries Venice was visited by a constant succession of epidemics of plague. This was the price she was doomed to pay for the enjoyment of her Oriental commerce. Standing, as she stood, at the meeting-place of east and west, so long as the commerce of the east passed to the west by way of Syria and Egypt, Venice knew no rival but Genoa, until the Turk appeared at Constantinople to challenge her ascendancy. Plague and commerce alike passed through Venice on their way to the countries of Central and Northern Europe. Plague was in some sense the measure of Venetian opulence, and with the loss of this opulence the number of her plagues declined.

Venice had two main trade routes by sea,<sup>1</sup> one to the east and one to the west, and two land routes to the north.

The first maritime route lay down the Adriatic, past the Ionian Isles, and round Cape Matapan to Crete, where it divided into four branch routes: (a) northwards to the Dardanelles, Constantinople, the Black Sea, and the Sea of Azov; (b) along the shores of the Morea and through the Aegean Islands to the Dardanelles; (c) to the ports of Asia Minor, Smyrna, and Aleppo, Cyprus, Syria, Alexandretta, and Beirut; (d) to Alexandria and Egypt. These two last branches linked Venice to the caravan routes that led from Ormuz on the Persian Gulf to Aleppo and Beirut, and from Suez to Alexandria, and at their far end penetrated into the heart of Asia, Persia, India, and Cathay.

The second maritime route lay by way of the Adriatic westward to Sicily, where it divided into two branch routes:

<sup>1</sup> Horatio Brown, *The Venetian Republic*.



(a) to Tunis, Tripoli, and the ports of Spain ; (b) through the Straits of Gibraltar northwards as far as England and Flanders, bringing London and Bruges into touch with the east.

The land routes from Venice to Central Europe lay for the most part outside the confines of Venetian territory. One passed by way of the Ampezzo valley northward to the Pusterthal and on to Innsbruck and Munich ; the other along the Po to Brescia and Bergamo, and thence by Lake Como and the Splügen Pass to Constance. From Constance trade lines diverged to all parts of Northern Europe.

A knowledge of these routes is necessary to understand the leading part that Venice and Constance played in the carriage and distribution of plague.

The discovery of the Cape route to the east in 1486, was the death-blow to the trade monopoly of Venice. The lines of commerce shifted step by step from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic, and away from the ships of Venice into those of the Portuguese, Spaniards, English, and Dutch.

The history of plague in Venice is in large part written in her public monuments : her archives tell the rest. Venice has virtually no literature of her own : two or three patriotic diarists, and that is all. Her Renaissance gave birth to no harvest of men of letters : painting and architecture sapped all her strength. Artists vied with architects to write her history on canvas or on stone, not for the enjoyment of private patrons, but for the embellishment of the city of their birth.

In A.D. 1410 plague swept over Venice and Chioggia. In 1423 another epidemic was imported from the east. It was this visitation that led the Venetians to establish a pest-house or lazaretto on the island of Santa Maria di Nazaret for infected persons and goods. It was supplied with food, medicine, and medical attendance out of the revenue from salt. This was the first institution of the kind in Europe, but it quickly led to the establishment of more elsewhere.

The Government of Venice was never wont to fold its hands when plague was at its door. So far back as the Black Death they had appointed three nobles as *provveditori sopra la salute della terra* to fight the scourge. In 1468 these were supplemented by the addition of two inhabitants of each *sestiere*, and in 1485 this commission was reorganized as a permanent Board of Health. So by the end of the fifteenth century Venice had organized and equipped an efficient defensive system against the constant recurrence of plague.

A second lazaretto was established during the plague of 1576 on the island of Sant' Erasmo, and in the same year the Republic summoned learned professors of medicine from Padua—Girolamo Mercuriale and Giovanni Capodivacca—to identify the disease, and it was no fault of the Republic that they pronounced it not to be plague.

A curious evidence of the mutual influence of religion and therapeutics on each other is the fixing of quarantine at forty days, because this was the period that Christ dwelt apart in the wilderness.

Venetian doctors for the most part seem now to have mended their ways and devoted themselves loyally to the service of the sick. In a book published in Venice in A.D. 1493, *Fasciculus medicus Johannis de Ketam*, the physician Pietro da Fossignano is shown visiting a plague patient. As he feels the pulse, he holds to his mouth and nostrils a sponge, steeped in some antipestilential aromatic. Pietro's death about A.D. 1400 helps towards fixing the date of this simple clinical precaution. In later years a special plague dress was devised for doctors, which was adopted from Italy by France, and of which several engravings exist of about the time of the 1720 plague of Marseilles (see pp. 206-8). Ambroise Paré recommends that the material should be camlet, serge, satin, taffeta, or morocco, but not cloth, frieze, or fur, which might harbour the poison and carry death to the healthy.



Venice had also her street ambulance in the brotherhood of S. Rocco, instituted for the purpose of conveying the sick to hospital and the dead to burial. Their services were sorely taxed in times of plague. A specimen of the working dress of the Order may still be seen in the Treasury of the Scuola di San Rocco. It is a loose white cotton overall with full hanging sleeves. On each side of the chest is an oval white satin badge, embroidered with red silk and edged with red lace. On one the figure of Christ is embroidered in silk: on the other that of S. Rocco with his dog. It is bound at the waist with a corded girdle of white cotton with heavily ornamented cotton tassels at each end. A deep peaked hood of the same material completely covers the head, having only slits as apertures for the eyes. White leather gloves complete the costume. A similar dress was worn by many of the charitable confraternities of Central Italy, and is to be seen in several Sienese pictures (see Plate VIII). It has its modern counterpart in the operating dress of the aseptic surgeon, but by a queer turn of the whirligig of time its purpose is no longer to keep infection out, but to keep it in.

The Guild of San Rocco had come into existence at least as early as A.D. 1415, but it was not till 1478 that leave was obtained from the Government to enlist a confraternity under the standard of San Rocco. Its first meeting-place was the church of San Giuliano, but in 1485 the guild undertook to build a church for the custody of the body of the saint, which some Venetians had surreptitiously removed from Montpellier. Five years sufficed to complete the church, and the saint's body was laid in it with great solemnity. The precious relic was destined to bestow great prestige on its possessors. Of the five great charitable guilds of Venice, that of S. Rocco was by far the greatest. From 1516 to the end of the Republic each Doge was enrolled a member, along with many of the richest merchants of

Venice. In this year the brethren determined to erect a meeting house adjacent to the church, which should be an added ornament to the city. So the building of the Scuola was commenced in 1517 by Bartolommeo Bon, only to be finished in 1550 by Antonio Scarpagnino.

While the Scuola was in course of construction, the original church of S. Rocco was found to be insecure, and was rebuilt, but not in its present form, which is no older than 1725. In 1559 the Confraternity entrusted its decoration to Tintoretto, and there are still to be seen there, on the rare occasions when daylight suffices, the four pictures in which the artist set himself to illustrate the life of the saint. These are (1) St. Roch in hospital; (2) St. Roch healing animals; (3) The capture of St. Roch; (4) The appearance of an angel to St. Roch in prison. The small picture that hangs by a side-altar—the ‘Betrayal of Christ’, by Titian—has received all the homage that should have been paid to Tintoretto’s subjects: indeed, the offerings rendered to this ‘miraculous’ picture enabled the guild to rebuild their Scuola. To this church the Doge came yearly on August 16 to implore St. Roch to ward off plague from the Republic.

In 1560 the growing wealth of the guild induced them to call in competition the leading painters of Venice to decorate the halls of the Scuola. Andrea Schiavone, Federigo Zuccaro, Giuseppe Salviati, Paolo Veronese, and Tintoretto were all invited to prepare drawings and submit them to the judges on the appointed day. While the others had merely sketched designs, Tintoretto had finished a complete picture, ‘St. Roch in glory’, that now occupies the centre of the ceiling of the refectory. To ensure still further his success, Tintoretto presented the picture to the guild. From this time until 1588 the decoration of the Scuola formed the chief part of Tintoretto’s work. By the beginning of 1566 he had completed the superb ‘Crucifixion’ in the refectory of the upper hall, and on its completion he was admitted



to the Confraternity, and assigned an annual subsidy of 100 ducats (about £50) in payment for three finished pictures each year. Here, at any rate, he found scope for the expression of an inexhaustible fancy: but those who have attempted to study the paintings of the Scuola will appreciate something of the difficulties he had to surmount owing to the defective light which, as in the church, renders the pictures invisible except on the brightest days.

As Michelangelo had done in the Sistine Chapel, so Tintoretto thought out in advance a comprehensive and harmonious scheme for the entire adornment of the halls. The key-note of it all is the dedication of the Scuola to San Rocco, the patron saint of the plague-stricken, and also of those who ministered to them. So the paintings in the upper hall represent acts of mercy and deliverance, illustrated in Christ's life on earth. Those in the lower hall of entrance, eight in number, setting forth mainly the history of the Virgin and her infant Son, form thus an appropriate prelude to the upper series. Giovanni Marchiori and his pupils have faithfully pursued the scheme in the twenty subjects from the life of St. Roch carved in the panelling of the upper hall. The great staircase that joins the two halls is decorated with frescoes of plague scenes by Zanchi (1666) and Negri (1673), of little artistic merit. Yet another memorial of plague survives in the rows of wooden standard lamps, set round the upper hall, which the brethren used to carry in processions to the honour of their patron saint.

Tintoretto was still at his work in the Scuola when the appalling plague of 1575-7 fell on Venice, carrying Titian to his grave, within close hail of his centenary. While others were hurried away to obscure burial in the common plague pits of Sant' Erasmo and the outlying islands, the body of the old man, who had brought so great glory to Venice, was accorded the honour of a public funeral by order of the Signoria. After lying in state it was carried to the beautiful

Gothic church of S. Maria Gloriosa dei Frari, wearing the insignia of Imperial Knighthood, conferred on him by Charles V, and placed in a tomb at the foot of the altar of the Cross. Here Titian sleeps his last sleep unmindful, be it hoped, of the outrage in marble inflicted on his memory by Ferdinand I of Austria, at the hands of Luigi and Pietro Zandomeneghi. Titian's eldest son died with him, and his second son, Pomponio, a canon of Milan, hastened to Venice, as soon as he was assured that all danger was past, and quickly dissipated the fortune that the painter had amassed by the thrift and labour of a lifetime.

For three years this plague devastated Venice, carrying off no less than 50,000 souls, one quarter of her whole population. The Doge, Luigi Mocenigo, displayed throughout the utmost courage and devotion. He himself superintended all the efforts to arrest the plague, and ministered in person to the sick. He went in solemn procession with all the confraternities of Venice to the church of S. Rocco, to vow the erection of another church, if only the saint would intercede for them. As Cyprian and Gregory had done before him, he addressed words of consolation and encouragement to his people in the sanctuary of his cathedral church. But Luigi was dead when the day came for his successor to summon the people of Venice to St. Mark's to fulfil Luigi's vow.

Picture to yourself Venice one July Sunday under a cloudless sky. From the pulpit of St. Mark's some aged patriarch has proclaimed the freedom of the city from plague. Out of the coloured gloom of the church files the procession into the dazzling glare of the Piazza. All Venice is there: Venice is in jubilant mood. St. Mark's, Ducal Palace, Campanile, and all the buildings around are gay with carpets and tapestries, with pictures and gilded shields. Banners of gorgeous colours flutter to the crisp sea-breeze from the columns of Theodore and the Lion. Amid wild shouting of people and roar of cannon, and ringing of bells



the procession wheels to the Piazzetta. Before it lies the lagoon, stretching over to S. Giorgio Maggiore, and away to the Lido beyond, sparkling and shimmering in the sunlight, like some great scintillating jewel. God and man seem to have joined hands there to create the fairest spot of earth. From Piazzetta to Giudecca a bridge of boats has been thrown over, near half a mile in length. On to the bridge goes the procession.<sup>1</sup> The guilds and confraternities, displaying their respective standards and carrying crosses, images of the Madonna and saints, and reliquaries, lead the way, followed by magistrates, nobles, and their ladies. Next come the patriarchs, the Church dignitaries, and canons in their rochets, the friars, chanting, under the banners of their fourteen orders, the clergy robed in rich copes embroidered with gold and sewn with jewels, under their eleven banners. Last of all, accompanied by senators and ambassadors, comes the Doge, Sebastiano Venier, hero of Lepanto, a noble figure, robed in white with a splendid mantle of silver brocade hanging from his shoulders. In a temporary wooden oratory built close to the place where the Redentore Church was to rise from the plans of Palladio, Mass was sung this day to music by Giuseppe Zarlino of Chioggia, the Doge's chief musician. And the sound of this jubilant day has echoed down the ages and may be still heard at the yearly *Festa del Redentore* in July, as the procession passes over its bridges of boats from San Zobenigo to Zattere, and Zattere to Giudecca, but shorn of much of its former glory. Where stood the wooden chauntry stands now Palladio's church, a plague-spot on the face of nature. Théophile Gautier, nevertheless, saw beauty in its aspect by the light of the setting sun. Within there are no pictures and no memorials of the plague to which it owes its being. A Venetian medal, showing the Doge with the banner of St. Mark kneeling before Christ, commemorates this plague.

<sup>1</sup> Molmenti, *Venezia*.

Venice has other churches to commemorate her plagues besides San Rocco and the Redentore; oldest of all, S. Giobbe, church and convent, built in the middle of the fifteenth century (1462-71) by Doge Cristoforo Moro, the friend of S. Bernardino, and dedicated to the Job of Scripture who was plagued with all manner of diseases. Over the high altar was once the famous picture by Giovanni Bellini, now in the Accademia, of the Madonna and Child enthroned between St. Job, St. John Baptist, St. Sebastian, St. Francis, and St. Louis of Toulouse. Venice brought the cult of S. Giobbe along with plague from the east: he is hardly known elsewhere in Italy.

Only a few years later (1506-18) another plague church, that of S. Sebastiano, was built for the Order of St. Jerome by the two architects, F. da Castiglione and A. Scarpagnino. It is the burial-place of Veronese, to whom most of its decoration is due. The ceilings of both church and sacristy are enriched with his pictures, set in deep gilded mouldings. Over the high altar is an 'Apotheosis of St. Sebastian', to whom the Madonna appears in heaven, along with St. Mark, St. Jerome, St. John Baptist, and St. Catharine of Alexandria. To the left of the altar is Veronese's famous 'Martyrdom of Marcus and Marcellinus'.

While this church was building Giorgione died of plague. About his four and thirtieth year he had become wildly enamoured of a young woman, and when the plague seized her he still paid her secret visits, and taking the sickness from her lips with her kisses, he paid for his love with his life.

Last, but best known of all, is the church of S. Maria della Salute, begun by Baldassare Longhena in 1632, to commemorate the plague of 1630-1, which carried off 46,490 in Venice, and 94,235 in the whole lagoons. Doge Niccolò Contarini had vowed a church to the Madonna of Health, if she would deliver the Republic from the plague. During its building a temporary wooden oratory was built on a piece



of land, which the Knights Templar had bestowed on the Republic, and Doge, Council, nobles, and people crossed over the Grand Canal by a bridge of boats to hear a solemn Mass. In the sacristy of Longhena's church are two seventeenth-century prints, one showing the procession as it crosses the pontoon bridge, the other, as it files up into the church. Each year in November the procession starts from St. Mark's and crosses the Grand Canal by the Redentore route, and circles round the church to the entrance facing the Canal. Modern Venice has transformed a solemn pageant into a fancy fair. These prints show the church as it now stands, on a platform at the top of a great flight of stairs leading up from the Grand Canal, but a statue of the Madonna has replaced the Angel of Pestilence on the summit of its larger dome.

S. Maria della Salute contains many memorials of plague. Over the high altar is a heavy group of marble statuary by Giusto il Corto. In the centre sits the Madonna holding her Child, with cherubs at her feet. On one side kneels a woman entreating her aid: on the other a cherub with flaming torch expels a plague demon of human form.

In the vault of the choir is a ceiling painting by Fiammingo showing Venice imploring liberation from plague.

In the sacristy is Titian's picture of St. Mark with St. Sebastian, St. Roch, Cosmas, and St. Damian, commemorating the plague of 1512, in which Giorgione perished (see Plate IX). Here, too, is Marco Basaiti's (second half of fifteenth century) votive picture of St. Sebastian, a fine figure in a beautiful Umbrian landscape, but not the peer of Sodoma's saint: and yet another picture of St. Roch, St. Sebastian, and St. Jerome by Girolamo da Treviso (1497-1544).

## CHAPTER XI

MILAN had suffered from the Black Death far less than other cities of Italy : maybe she had acquired a transient immunity. For the three succeeding centuries her history is one long catalogue of plagues, of which two claim special notice.

In 1576 plague broke out in late July. Carlo Borromeo was archbishop at the time. The son of Ghiberto Borromeo, Count of Arona, and Mary de Medici, Carlo was of noble parentage. His influence gained for him in early life the archbishopric of Milan. Amid all his wealth his own personal life was ordered with temperance and humility. Stern, or as some say cruel, to track out and repress all the abuses that had invaded the Church in his diocese, he earned the jealous dislike of his clergy and of the religious orders. The Brothers of Humility made open attempt on his life, but by a miracle he escaped them. Carlo was away at Lodi when news reached him that plague had broken out in Milan. Hastening back to the city he found that the governor, many officials, and all the rich had fled. All was in chaos. The people turned in despair to their spiritual father, and entrusted the care of the town to him. He set them to work at once to adapt the great hospital of St. Gregory for the reception of the sick, and later to build six lazarettos of wood outside the walls. All these he equipped and furnished with linen from his own palace. For its better administration he divided the city into four quarters, and put over each an overseer with a staff of helpers. His example of courage and personal devotion served to attract many of the secular clergy, monks, and nuns to the service of the sick. Even lay men and women organized a nursing guild among themselves. Carlo himself



went everywhere, giving directions for housing the sick and burying the dead. He visited even those parishes beyond the walls, where the disease was raging, providing for the sick, feeding the needy, and rousing the clergy to the loyal discharge of their duty. Famine soon came to add another horror to pestilence. Borromeo collected all the destitute into an encampment and arranged the supply of food. First he had all his own silver plate melted down to provide the necessary money. When this ran out, he begged it from door to door, and finally incurred huge debts on his own personal security. Beyond such material aids as these, Carlo Borromeo brought to the stricken Milanese the spiritual comforts of religion. From the pulpit of his cathedral he expounded to them the Lamentations of Jeremiah, showing them how they applied to Milan. From the altar steps he chanted with quivering voice the penitential psalms, and kneeling before the altar offered himself to God as a sacrifice for his people. Through the streets of the city he marched at the head of penitential processions with bare feet and the rope of the criminal around his neck. But through it all he passed unscathed, himself and his eight-and-twenty attendant priests. Only 17,000 died in Milan, and 8,000 in the districts round about: that so few died out of so vast a multitude of sick was attributed to the ministrations of their archbishop.

As the traveller comes down from the Alps, skirting the shores of Lago Maggiore, where gardens are radiant in spring with camellias, magnolias, mimosa, and myrtle, one feature only blurs the faultless landscape. On a ridge, high over the lake at Arona, towers on its pedestal the statue of Carlo Borromeo, a senseless, soulless colossus, in copper and bronze, mocking the skies. Your guide-book tells you you may go up inside its body. If you do so on a hot day you may learn something of the sufferings of Phalaris, roasted in the belly of his own brazen bull. But perhaps you



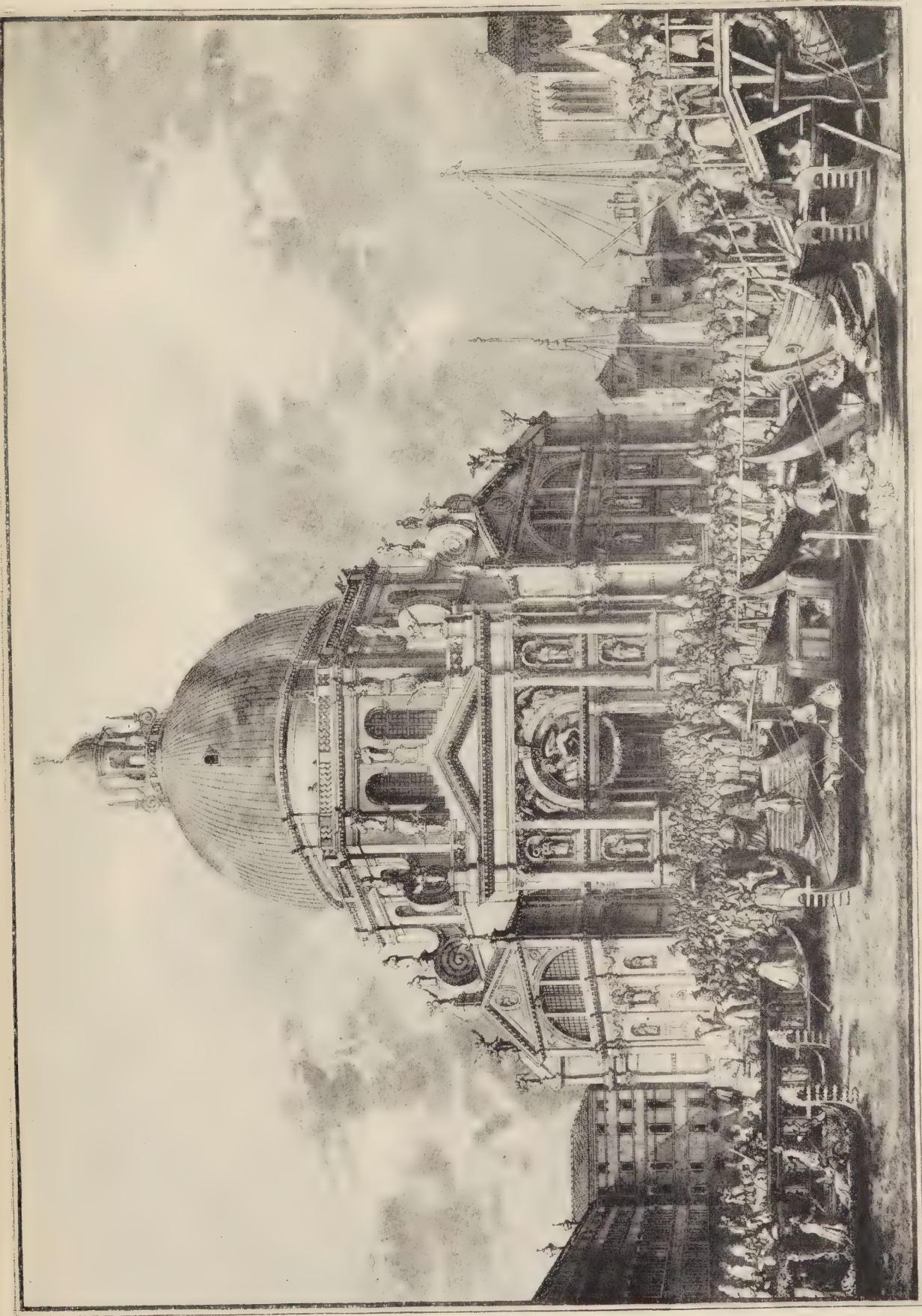
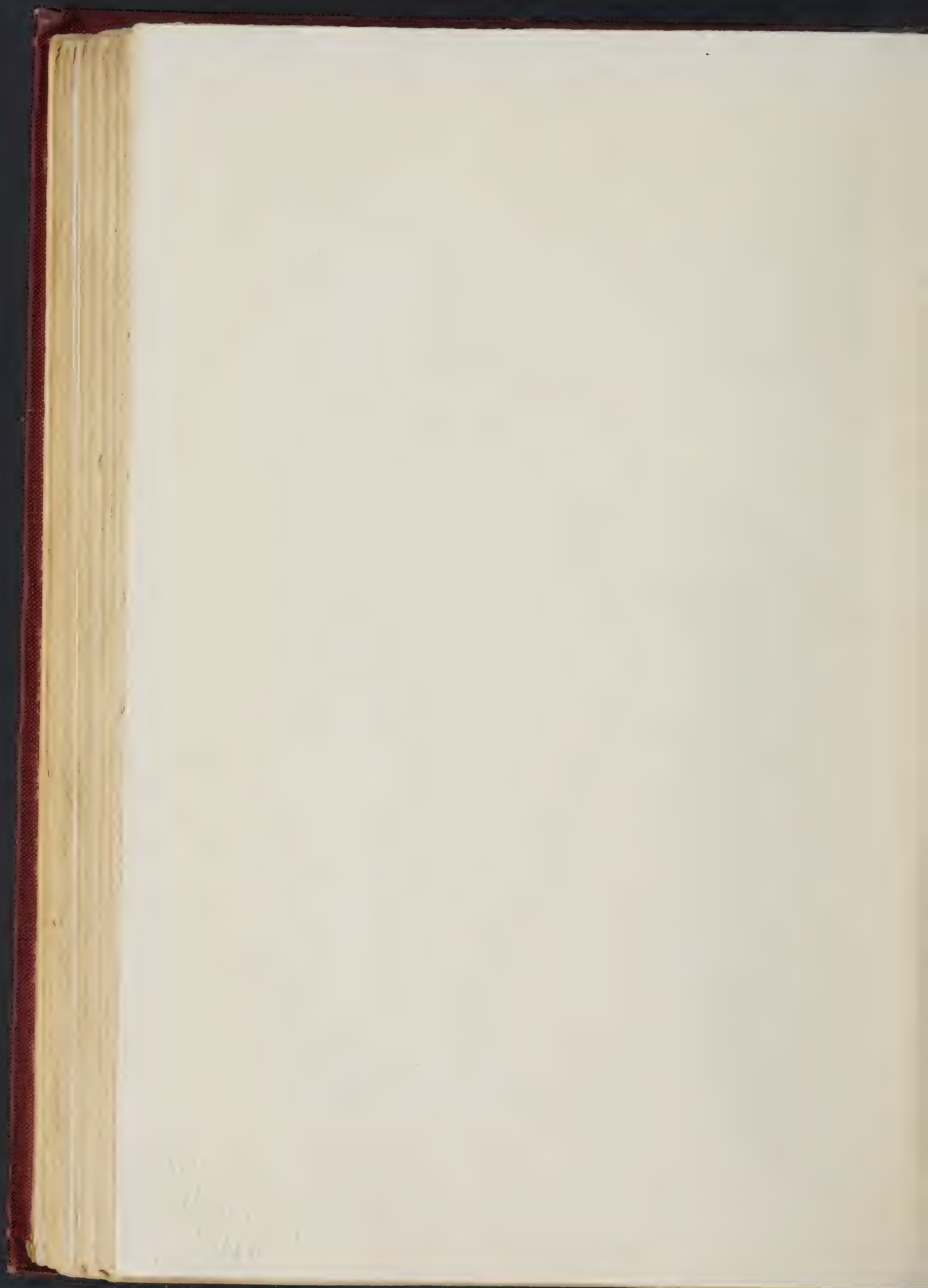


PLATE XXI PROCESSION TO S. MARIA DELLA SALUTE, VENICE

From a seventeenth-century engraving (Face Page 172)











CARLO BORROMEO. BY ANNIBALE CARRACCI



will do as well to stay beneath and pray that something rather of the spirit of Borromeo may enter into your soul.

Religion has canonized S. Carlo Borromeo ; Art has ensured him immortality. In the churches and galleries of Milan he figures as patron saint against plague, sometimes alone, sometimes conjointly with St. Roch. In Venice he gives place to St. Roch, in Florence to St. Sebastian. In parts of Central Italy S. Carlo reappears, attended often by local saints, interceding with the Madonna. In the church of S. Dominico in Perugia a picture shows him along with S. Catharine of Siena, supplicating the Virgin. At S. Carlo in Corso at Rome, along with S. Ambrose, he intercedes with Christ, and another picture in the same church represents his apotheosis.

Memorials of Borromeo are innumerable. The sacristy of Milan Cathedral contains a life-size effigy in mitre and robes, all in wrought silver : also a gilded wooden cross, on which the various emblems of the Passion are carved in relief, which he carried in plague processions : also a silk embroidered portrait of him in his mitre. S. Carlo Catinari at Rome has one of his mitres, and part of the rope that he wore as a halter.

Beneath the floor of Milan Cathedral, below the dome and in front of the choir, is the Cappella of Carlo Borromeo. His remains lie in a silver coffin, supported on a silver altar, each elaborately engraved and embossed. The hexagonal chamber has the whole surface of its walls coated with plates of silver, on which are reliefs representing a series of scenes from his life. In one he is giving alms to the plague-stricken : in a second he is baptizing children in a plague hospital : in a third he is walking with feet and head bare, and with a halter round his neck, in a plague procession, preceding the sacred relics that are carried beneath a canopy.

Portraits of S. Carlo in Milan, those in the Cathedral, in the Borromeo Palace and elsewhere, all in profile, show the



prominent nose and receding forehead and a degree of ugliness that would almost seem to forbid enrolment in the catalogue of the saints. A rugged full-faced portrait by Annibale Carracci (1560-1609), now in the Hermitage at St. Petersburg, seems less discordant with the halo.

Pietro da Cortona (1596-1669) painted a picture of Borromeo heading a plague procession, which is one of the best of its kind. It is now over the altar of S. Carlo Catinari at Rome, but hidden from view by a brazen symbol of rays of glory.

The familiar theme of innumerable pictures both in Italy and France is Carlo Borromeo carrying the Sacrament to the plague-stricken. Some of the best known are those by Jakob van Oost (le Vieux) (1600-71) in the Louvre : by Lemonnier in the Musée at Rouen : by Cigoli (1559-1613) in the church of Santa Maria Nuova at Cortona : by Francesco Gossi in the church of Poveri at Bologna : and by Baldassare Franceschini in the church of the Barnabites at Pescia.

The Flemish painter Gaspard de Crayer (1585-1669) has varied somewhat the hackneyed features of the subject. In his picture, Carlo Borromeo, in red episcopal robes, followed by two acolytes carrying the taper and cross, bends down and offers the Sacrament to a dying man, who kneels before him with head bandaged and shirt thrown open over his bare chest. Behind the man are two women, one of whom supports his body, while the other in the shadow of a doorway carries a glass of water in her hand. Kneeling beside the man, with hands joined in prayer, a little boy awaits the Sacrament : in the foreground lies a dead child. Before this little corpse a man is seated on the ground, supporting his head, his legs bare and covered with ulcers. Behind him are two women, one of whom covers her mouth with a handkerchief, while the other stretches out her hands to an attendant deacon, who is distributing alms. The background is a street of Milan with a vista of open country beyond.





BORRROMEO LEADING A PLAGUE PROCESSION

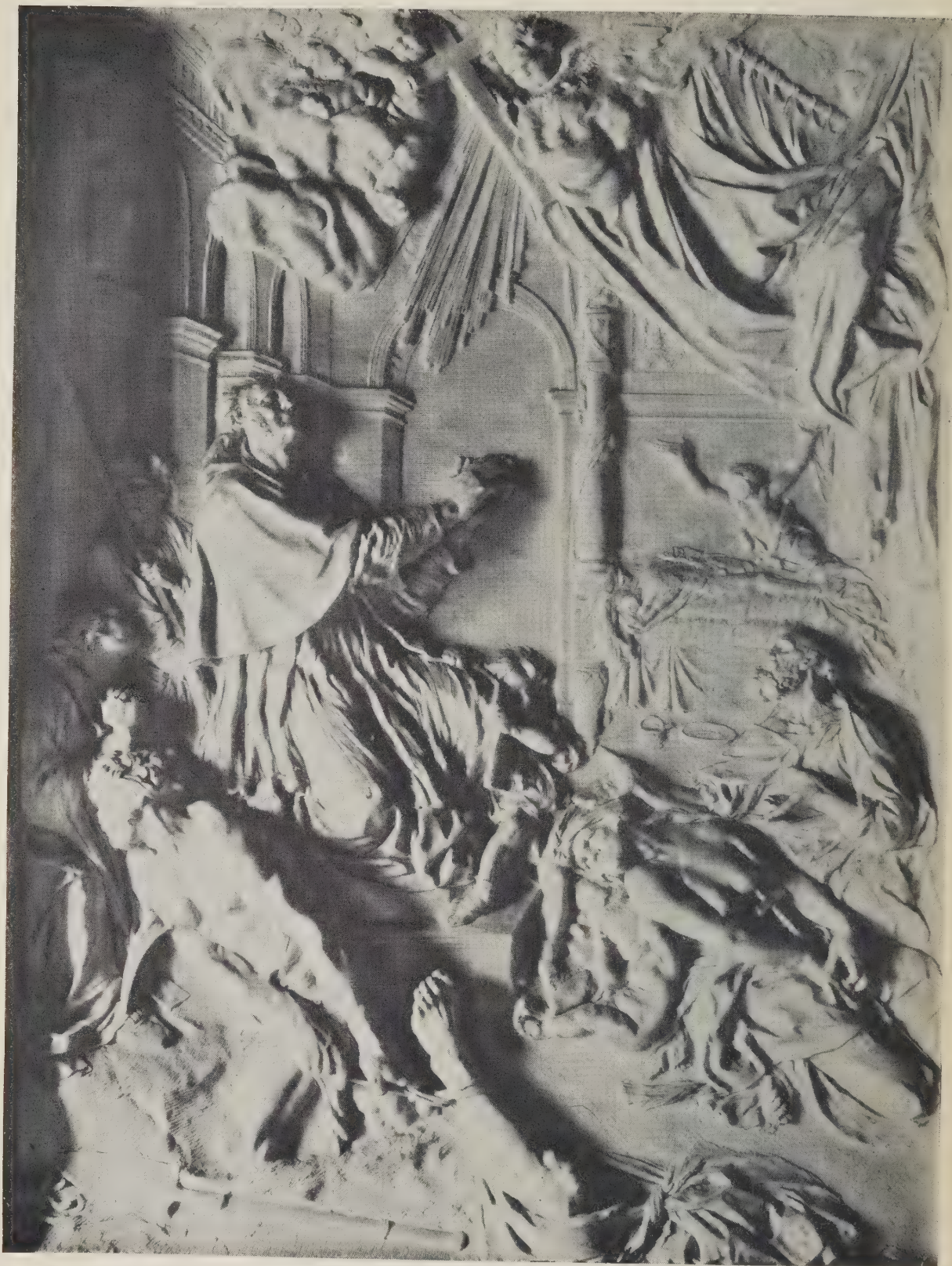
By Pietro da Cortona











BORROMEO INTERCEDING FOR THE PLAGUE-  
STRICKEN

A marble bas-relief by P. Puget



Puget (1622-94) has represented the same subject in a marble bas-relief, now in the Santé at Marseilles. Borromeo kneels in earnest supplication amid a group of dead and dying. His eyes are fixed on a cross borne aloft by cherubs. He is attended by acolytes, who carry a cross and chalice, and a child clings to his robes. In the foreground a convict drags off a corpse for burial. In the background a woman bends in wild despair over a bed, on which a dead man is stretched.

In 1630 occurred the Great Plague of Milan, well known to many by the description of Manzoni (1785-1873) in his *Promessi Sposi*. For his information he has drawn on many sources, and not least on the contemporary record of Canon Ripamonti, written by request of the Magistracy as a supplement to his History of Milan.

This volume on the plague bears an emblematic engraving on the title-page. A skeleton holds in his hands weapons, armour, bones, and books all strung together. The toes of his feet protrude from beneath a carpet on which lies a plague-stricken man. In front of the skeleton is an altar, on which stand taper and crucifix. Beside the altar sits a woman, a drawn sword in her right hand, her left arm embracing a stork: a naked child is by her side. On the frontal of the altar is the title of the book: 'Josephi Ripamontii, Canonici Scalensis Chronistae Urbis Mediolani, De Peste Quae Fuit Anno c1630cxxx Libri v, Desumpti Ex Annalibus Urbis Quos LX Decurionum Autoritate Scribebat.'

In his *Storia della Colonna Infame*, published in 1840, Manzoni has told the trial and punishment of the two *Untori*, accused of spreading the plague by means of ointments. The home of one of them was destroyed by order of the State, and the ground on which it stood declared



accursed. On it a stone column was erected in 1630, bearing the following inscription : <sup>1</sup>

‘ Here, where this plot of ground extends, formerly stood the shop of the barber, Giangiacomo Mora, who had conspired with Guglielmo Piazza, Commissary of the Public Health, and with others, while a frightful plague exercised its ravages, by means of deadly ointments spread on all sides, to hurl many citizens to a cruel death. For this, the Senate, having declared them both to be enemies of their country, decreed that, placed on an elevated car, their flesh should be torn with red-hot pincers, their right hands be cut off, and their bones be broken : that they should be extended on the wheel, and at the end of six hours be put to death and burnt. Then, and that there might remain no trace of these guilty men, their possessions should be sold at public sale, and their ashes be thrown into the river ; and to perpetuate the memory of their deed the Senate wills, that the house in which the crime was projected shall be razed to the ground, shall never be rebuilt, and that in its place a column shall be erected, which shall be called Infamous. Keep afar off, then, afar off, good citizens, lest this accursed ground should pollute you with its infamy. August 1630.’

This cursing of the site recalls the curse of Joshua <sup>2</sup> on the site of Jericho after its capture : ‘ Cursed be the man before the Lord, that riseth up and buildeth this city Jericho : he shall lay the foundation thereof in his firstborn, and in his youngest son shall he set up the gates of it.’ And the Constitutions of Moses <sup>3</sup> pronounced a similar curse on cities that turned aside from the true religion.

In 1777 Count Pietro Verri, Counsellor of State in the service of Maria Theresa, published a treatise on Torture, in which special reference was made to this case at Milan in 1630. His work, however, did not see the light till 1804. Then in 1839 the *Processo originale degli Untori nella peste del 1630* was issued in Milan, giving a full official account of the trial of these Anointers. Fletcher, in 1895, drew up

<sup>1</sup> Translated in *A Tragedy of the Great Plague of Milan*, R. Fletcher, M.D. 1895.

<sup>2</sup> Joshua vi. 26.

<sup>3</sup> Deuteronomy xiii. 15-18.

a summary of evidence from all the sources in his *Tragedy of the Great Plague of Milan*.

Early in the morning of June 21, 1630, one Catarina Rosa, a woman of the lower classes, saw from the balcony of her house a man going down the street writing on a sheet of paper. He stopped to wipe his fingers on the wall of a house, probably to get rid of ink-stains, but the woman's fear at once conjured up the superstitious image of a deadly ointment smeared on the walls to spread the plague. A crowd of excited women flocked to the Council Chamber to inform the Senate, who at once ordered the man's arrest. Henceforth no one dared touch a wall. Ripamonti tells how three young French travellers fared, who in admiring the marble of a temple unsuspectingly ventured to touch it. Someone saw them do it, and raised the alarm. Forthwith they were savagely set upon and hurled into gaol, and only released when it was found that there was no vestige of evidence to suggest anything but innocent curiosity.

Again, an old man of eighty was seen to dust a bench in the church of St. Anthony with his cloak before sitting down. Immediately the women cried out that he was anointing the benches, and the worshippers set on him there and then in the church, and after beating him brutally dragged him before the magistrates. Ripamonti believes that he died of his injuries.

The search for the suspected Anointer resulted in the arrest of one Guglielmo Piazza, a scrivener who carried an ink-horn at his belt. He was also a commissioner of health, that is to say, a petty official employed to report cases of plague. Throughout two applications of torture he stoutly denied the offence, but in his cell, broken with suffering and fearing a renewal of torture, he yielded to the suggestions of those around him. He confessed his guilt, and declared that he obtained the deadly ointment from the barber Giangiacomo Mora. This man was straightway



arrested and carried to the court, but there vehemently asserted his innocence and vowed that he had never seen Piazza. Under torture, however, he gave way, and vied with the unhappy Mora in concocting falsehoods. Among others, they implicated Count Padilla, son of the Commandant of the Castle, but in the end he was acquitted, and it is from the notes of his trial that Verri obtained the material for the narrative of Piazza and Mora.

Mora, like most barbers of his day, dabbled in medicine, so that medicinal jars and vessels were found in his shop. These, he asserted, contained preservatives against the plague, and probably with truth, for during epidemics of plague they were in great demand. Ambroise Paré gives an elaborate formula for a preservative water, with which to wash the body frequently and rinse the mouth, and a few drops of it were to be placed as well in the nostrils and ears. Similar nostrums were in great demand during the Great Plague of London and that of Marseilles in 1720.

Piazza had occasionally visited Mora's shop as a customer of the barber, and both stated that Mora had undertaken to prepare a pot of his preservative for Piazza. On this innocent transaction was to be built up a charge of wholesale murder. Mora was induced by torture to admit that Piazza had supplied him with foam from the mouths of plague victims to mix with his ointment.

In the intervals of torture Mora and Piazza more than once recanted and declared that their confessions were false, but a renewal of torture soon induced them to retract. The ignorant ferocity of the populace called aloud for satisfaction. At the conclusion of their examination the unhappy victims were carried off for the execution of a terrible sentence, in spite of the pledge of impunity. With the merciful prospect of death before them, they openly asserted that all their admissions incriminating others were false and had been extracted from them by their terror of further torture.









At the end of the *Processo originale degl' Untori* is a folded plate representing in all its details the execution of Piazza and Mora. It is a rough reproduction of an older undated engraving, which Fletcher has reproduced from a copy in the collection of medical prints and engravings in the library of the Surgeon-General's Office at Washington. The engraver of this was Orazio Colombo, and it was published in Rome by the authority of the Nuncio of the Roman College.

On the top of the engraving is its title, which may be translated, 'The sentence pronounced on those, who had poisoned many persons in Milan in the year 1630.' Fletcher appends this further description: 'This is followed by the names of the Magnificos, who sat in judgement, and the particulars of the punishment decreed. Each scene in the picture has its letter, which is referred to in an explanatory legend below. The entire disregard of the unities of time and place, which characterized such productions, is well displayed in this curious engraving. On the right is the shop of the barber Mora, and in front of it the "Column of Infamy" is already erected. A large platform car, drawn by two oxen, exhibits the victims, executioners, and priests. A brazier of live charcoal contains the pincers with which the flesh was to be torn. The barber's right hand is on the block, and a chopper held over the wrist is about to be struck down by a mallet held aloft by the executioner. Further on is seen a large platform, on which the two victims are having their limbs broken by an iron bar, preparatory to their exposure on the wheel for six hours. The wheels are also displayed, one of them already on a pole, with the men bound upon them. Still further on are the fires consuming the bodies, and, last scene of all, on the extreme left is a fussy little stream, foaming under bridges, which is supposed to be a river, and into it a man is throwing the ashes of the two malefactors.'



One dark night in 1788 Nature for very shame let loose a storm that wrecked the Column: her minion Man then tardily demolished the monument of his own infamy. The balcony of Catarina Rosa's house was also taken down, so that no structure stands to call to mind the hideous tragedy. The corner-house of the Vedra de' Cittadini, on the left hand as one comes from the Corso di Porta Ticinese, occupies the site of poor Mora's house. A dwelling has rested on the accursed site since 1803.

It is surprising to find that not only does not Ripamonti deny the guilt of the victims, but now and again he seems to hint at its reality. It has to be borne in mind that in his position as official historiographer of Milan it was hardly permissible for him to express sentiments opposed to popular conviction and the decisions of the courts of justice. As late as 1832, during an epidemic of cholera in St. Petersburg, the most circumstantial statements of miscreants putting poison in the food and drink of the people were in every mouth.

Manzoni's *Colonna Infame* is a simple unadorned narrative of the trial and execution of the two Anointers, quite different in literary form from his *Promessi Sposi*. It is written with a definite purpose in view. Verri had introduced the story into his *Observations on Torture*, merely as an illustration of the way in which the confession of a crime, both physically and morally impossible, may be extracted by torture. Manzoni retells the tale, in the interest of humanity at large, to show that no matter how deep may have been the belief in the efficacy of ointments, and despite the existence of a legislature that countenanced and approved torture, it was competent to the judges to convict them, only by recourse to artifices and expedients, of the injustice of which they were perfectly well aware.

Manzoni's *Promessi Sposi* is a happy blend of antiquarian research and imaginative description, and the incidents of the plague are dexterously woven into the fabric of his story.

Manzoni wrote at a time when literature, freed from the trammels of convention, was being slowly brought into harmony with the outlook of modern thought. Though an aristocrat by birth, his upbringing had taught him to regard life with the eyes of the peasant, and not with those of his overlord. In his genius for romance and in his reverence for the past Manzoni has much in common with Scott, but with this difference, that Scott sees the social fabric from above, Manzoni from below. To Scott life was a pageant in which knights of chivalry and courtly dames shared all the leading parts: Manzoni's stage is filled with men struggling to be rid of the yoke of feudal oppression. The plague of Milan, falling alike on rich and poor, afforded him the text from which to preach the essential equality of all men. His whole narrative is so moulded as to throw into striking contrast the vices of the rich with the virtues of the poor. The plague scenes, too, give him scope for his remarkable insight into the psychology of crowds, and for his skill in marshalling men in masses, a gift in which he rivals Tintoretto. It is the genius of Manzoni that he persuades without preaching.

The total mortality of this pestilence in Milan has been estimated roughly at 150,000 persons. The Sanità, or Board of Health, profiting by the lessons of the previous plague, seem to have acted with sense and energy, though hampered by the ignorant obstinacy of the Senate, the Council of Decurions, and the Magistrates, who were afraid of driving away trade, if the presence of plague were admitted. One strange remedial measure was the organization of an immense procession through the streets in honour of San Carlo. During the procession all the sequestered houses were fastened up with nails to prevent the infected inmates from joining in it. Deaths were so numerous at the height of the plague that the burial-pits were filled, and bodies lay putrefying in the houses and streets. The Sanità



sought the help of two priests, who undertook to dispose of all the corpses in four days. With the assistance of peasants, whom they summoned from the country in the name of religion, three immense pits were dug. The Sanità employed *monatti* to bring out the dead and cart them to the pits, and the priests accomplished their task within the appointed time. Besides the *monatti* they appointed *apparitores*, or summoners, who went in advance of the *monatti* ringing a bell to warn the people to bring out their dead. *Commissari* supervised both *apparitores* and *monatti*. Piazza was one of these overseers.

The plagues of the seventeenth century have left behind them very many memorials both in literature and in art : among them the great plague of Milan is only one of many.

Southern France was attacked again and again, and in 1643 plague raged fiercely at Lyons. Over the portico of the church of Notre-Dame de Fourvière, which stands high up on the precipitous hill that overhangs the town, is a frieze commemorating this plague.

In Italy, city after city succumbed. Guido's picture, 'Il Pallione del Voto,' reminds us that Bologna suffered along with Milan. Venice suffered too, and out of her ruin rose the church of S. Maria della Salute.

Florence retains in the Bargello a hideous reminiscence of her visitation in a wax representation of 'Pestilenza' by Zumbo Gaetano Giulio (1656-1701). Corpses are lying about in various stages of decomposition : among them lies a dead mother beside her infant child. A man, whose nostrils are covered with a bandage, attempts to carry away a corpse. In the background great bonfires are burning. The modelling of the carcasses is anatomically exact, but the production as a whole is utterly repulsive.

In 1656 Naples assumes the leading rôle in this hideous Dance of Death. Soldiers brought the plague on a transport

from Sardinia. At first the viceroy attempted to disguise the true character of the disease. The first doctor who dared to pronounce the sickness plague was promptly put in prison. Malcontents spread the report that the Spaniards had designedly introduced the plague, and were employing people to go through the city in disguise, sowing broadcast poisoned dust. The infuriated populace turned on the Spanish soldiery, who sought safety by transferring the accusation to the French. Nothing but blood would satisfy the mob, and Angelucci di Tivoli, reputed author of the plague powder, was broken on the wheel as a peace-offering to their bloodthirsty fury. The Spaniards were accused also of poisoning the holy water in the churches by means of the deadly powder. Superstition was rampant in every form. One said that he had been miraculously cured by drinking holy water before an image of the Virgin. Another saw a marble statue of the Madonna and Child in the church of S. Severo covered with sweat, and the faces of both livid and marked by the plague. A doctor, Francesco Mosca, who printed a formula for curing the plague, was honourably entitled *Protomedico*. A nun prophesied that the building of a convent on the hill of St. Martin for her sisterhood would bring to an end the pestilence. The building was taken in hand in eager haste, rich and poor vying in bodily labour, but in spite of all their efforts the mortality grew apace. By a strange perversity of reasoning penitential processions paraded both day and night the very streets in which priests, in terror of the contagion, were administering the Sacrament on the end of a stick. The death-roll of six months was 400,000 lives. Various writers have described this plague, among them Muratori, Giannone, and de Renzi in his *Naples in the year 1656*, published in 1667. The Papal Nuncio in Naples at the time thought fit to write a pamphlet on it, and of modern writers Shorthouse has made poor use of it in his *John Inglesant*.



Micco Spadara (1612-79), who actually witnessed this plague, has left a picture of it, which is now in the National Museum at Naples. It represents the Piazza Mercatello, a veritable pandemonium of dead and dying. *Monatti*, drawn from the galley-slaves, are dragging the corpses with hooks to carts in which to carry them to the burial-pits. Here and there sedan chairs are seen. These were used to carry the sick to the lazarettos. At first chair-bearers were selected from the citizens who volunteered for the task, but when all these were dead, galley-slaves and convicts took their place. In the plague of Marseilles in 1720 sedans were put at the disposal of the doctors, 'for their more easy conveyance everywhere', by order of the Town Council.

There was plague in Rome as well as Naples in 1656. Nicolas Poussin (1594-1665) was resident in Rome, and has left the testimony of an eyewitness in his picture, 'The Plague of Rome,' now in the Czernin Collection at Vienna. It is a landscape with architectural features, of which Denio<sup>1</sup> gives this brief notice: 'Two men are seen dragging a corpse to the mouth of a vault, whose opening is already barred by dead bodies. A man, enveloped in a white mantle, directs the bearers where to go: by his side is a jackal-like dog. On the high platform of the receptacle we notice a group of six men. Broken columns take the place of the half-seen trees in other works, while sarcophagi and tombs indicate a cemetery. Beyond the arch stretches the Campagna.' Poussin has introduced into the picture the Castle of S. Angelo, mindful, no doubt, of the legend of Gregory's vision.

The church of Santa Maria in Campitelli at Rome was rebuilt, in its present form, in 1659, by Carlo Rainaldi, to accommodate a miraculous image of the Virgin, to which the cessation of the plague of 1656 was ascribed. The church is sometimes called S. Maria in Portico, because of the

<sup>1</sup> Nicolas Poussin, p. 134.

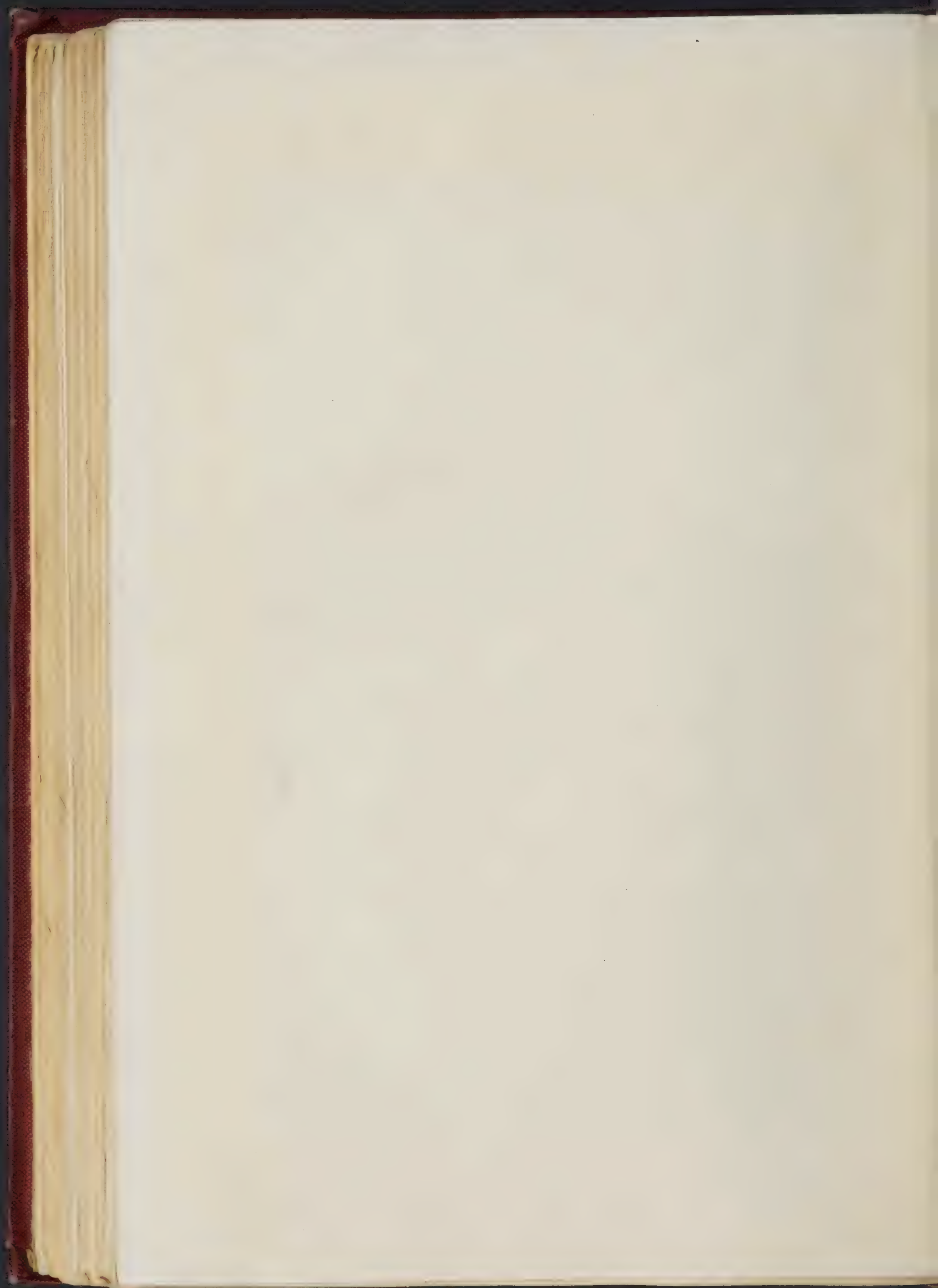




PLATE XXVI    PLAGUE OF NAPLES, 1656. BY MICCO SPADARA

Photograph by Brogi, Florence    (Face Page 184)





neighbouring Portico of Octavia. The miraculous Madonna is placed now beneath the canopy over the high altar. It is still believed to protect Rome from the contagion of pestilence. Here, too, came constantly the Elder Pretender and his son Henry, who took his Cardinal's title from this church, to offer prayers to this self-same image of the Madonna, for the liberation of England from the plague of Protestant apostasy. To this end James instituted in perpetuity an office of prayer, and ordained that every Saturday Mass should be said at 11 of the morning before the picture, with the Sacrament exposed, and that after recital of the prayers a blessing should be given along with the Sacrament. This ceremony has ever since been regularly performed.

In the sacristy is a framed engraving of the miraculous Madonna, dated 1747. It is surrounded by a series of small pictures, one of which shows the appearance of the image to S. Galla in the pontificate of John I (523-6), as she ministered to the wants of twelve poor men in her house. Another shows Pope John dedicating the miraculous picture in the oratory of S. Galla, which was transformed later into the church of S. Maria in Campitelli. The remaining pictures represent scenes in successive pontificates, in which this miraculous Madonna brought about a cessation of plague. A brief explanation in Latin is attached to each.

The plague of 1656 occurred in the pontificate of Alexander VII. This Pope did much to atone for the craven spirit of his papal predecessors by his courage and devotion to his people throughout the epidemic. It is surprising that no memorial has been erected to commemorate his services.

Two rare contemporary prints represent scenes in the course of this visitation. One is figured by Lanciani in his *Golden Days of the Renaissance*:<sup>1</sup> the other is reproduced here.<sup>2</sup> Both were to be seen in the Medical Exhibition in the

<sup>1</sup> p. 84.

<sup>2</sup> From an engraving in the author's possession.



Castel S. Angelo in the spring of 1912. Lanciani's print shows the following scenes :

1. Inspection of the city gates by Prince Chigi.
2. Barge-loads of corpses from the lazaretto on the island of S. Bartolommeo.
- 3-5. Various methods of fighting the plague in infected districts.
6. The ' Field of Death ' near St. Paul-outside-the-Walls.

The second print is of even greater interest than this : the first two rows of plates give some idea of the character of the lazarettos, and show how they were guarded by palisades and sentries : they also show the carts for transport of the sick attended by armed soldiers. The disinfection of the books and personal ornaments of the sick, a dead dog being dragged away to be thrown into the river, and a sick-cart marked with a cross, are other details of interest. The third row indicates the removal of infected goods to places outside the city, where they were either washed or cleansed ; places where other things were deposited ; a country residence of the Popes converted into a convalescent home ; and the ruined palace of the Antonines, where woollen goods were taken for disinfection. The fourth row represents chiefly wash-houses and washing-places, to which clothes and bedding were removed for cleansing. The fifth row, the execution of those who transgressed the sanitary regulations, the shooting of sick criminals, and the various measures taken to restrict the river traffic. A cable is thrown across the river, and palisades are erected on the shores, so as to break all contact between the city and boats bringing in provisions. The huts are shown, in which soldiers and officials were lodged, whose duty it was to compel obedience to the prescribed regulations.









## CHAPTER XII

THE Great Plague of London, which reached its height in 1665, has left an abundant aftermath both in literature and art. The main story of its ravages is too well known to call for repetition.

There were still some ready to see in the plague, as they were in the case of the fire, evidence of the handiwork of malevolent Jews. Since their expulsion from England by Edward I, the Jews had never yet obtained the legal right of re-entry, their open petition to Cromwell having failed. With the restoration of Charles II to the throne, they seem to have taken the matter into their own hands and found their way quietly back, so that at the time of the plague there were many resident in London, to the great advantage of trade and to the relief of an ever-needy Government. But three centuries of plague, punctuated by fierce outbreaks at regularly recurring intervals, had served to unravel much of the mystery of pestilence, and the people had learnt that it was not to be exorcised by a holocaust of Jews, or by the brutal murder of imaginary poisoners.

Celestial portents were not lacking to presage the plague. A blazing comet appeared for several months before the plague. Men affected to see, in its dull colour and slow solemn movement, a prediction of the heavy punishment of pestilence ; whereas that which preceded the fire was swift and flaming and foretold a rapid retribution.

Superstition raked up images afresh from the scrap-heap of discarded fancies. Women saw flaming swords in the heavens, some even saw angels brandishing them over their heads. Astrologers had strange tales of malignant



conjunctions of the planets. Medical opinion was still divided along the same lines of cleavage, as it had been for 2,000 years before. There were those who referred the disease to some occult poison, and those who referred it to an excess of some manifest quality, such as heat, or cold, or moisture, in each case corrupting the body humours. Speculation was rife as to the nature of the causal poison. Some, as Lucretius had done, conceived it to be pestiferous corpuscles of atomic character, outside the range of human vision, generated either in the heavens by a malignant conjunction of planets, or in the soil, and so often liberated by the agency of earthquakes. These poisons, however generated, found their way into the human body through the medium of the distempered atmosphere.

Some had noticed an unusual absence of birds before the epidemic, as Thucydides and Livy had done in their times. Boyle observed a great diminution of flies in 1665, Boghurst a superabundance of flies and ants in 1664. Sir George Ent and others attributed the disease to minute invisible insects, but Blackmore conceived these to be rather a consequence than a cause.

Insects, so called, had been vaguely associated with pestilence from remote antiquity, more especially flies, lice, and locusts; but in the medical literature of the sixteenth century and after they are assigned a much more definite rôle. Mercurialis<sup>1</sup> states that huge numbers of caterpillars paraded the streets of Venice during the plague of 1576. Goclenus<sup>2</sup> mentions swarms of spiders during the plague of Hesse in 1612, and Hildanus swarms of flies and caterpillars this same year in plague-stricken Lausanne. Bacon speaks of flies and locusts, as characteristic of pestilential years, and Diemerbroeck<sup>2</sup> of flies, gnats, butterflies, beetles, grasshoppers, and hornets in the same connexion. Gottwald<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *De Peste.*

<sup>2</sup> *De Peste.*

<sup>3</sup> *Reports to Royal Society.*

reported the presence of multitudes of spiders during the plague of Dantzic in 1709. Arabian physicians considered the putrefaction of swarms of dead locusts an important cause of pestilence. Hancock,<sup>1</sup> as late as 1821, argued that locusts caused famine by destroying the crops, and so prepared the way for human pestilence.

Talismans, amulets, reliquaries, and all the stock-in-trade of magic were in brisk demand among the populace. Quack vendors of antipestilential remedies innumerable effectively replaced physicians, most of whom took refuge in flight. All honour to those who stood fast at their posts and reclaimed for medicine what Galen had renounced, the captaincy of its own soul. These are the men who had no fear for 'the pestilence that walketh in darkness or the arrow that flieth by day':

- |                          |   |   |   |
|--------------------------|---|---|---|
| 1. Dr. Francis Glisson   | } | Presidents of the Royal College<br>of Physicians. |   |
| 2. Sir Thomas Witherley  |   |   |   |
| 3. Dr. Nicholas Davys    | } | Fellows of the Royal College<br>of Physicians.    |   |
| 4. Dr. Edward Deantry    |   |   |   |
| 5. Dr. Thomas Allen      |   |   |   |
| 6. Sir John Baber        |   |   |   |
| 7. Dr. Peter Barwick     |   |   |   |
| 8. Dr. Humphrey Brooks   |   |   |   |
| 9. Dr. Alexander Burnett |   |   |   |
| 10. Dr. Elisha Coysh     |   |   |   |
| 11. Dr. John Glover      |   |   |   |
| 12. Dr. Nathaniel Hodges |   |   |   |
| 13. Dr. Nathan Paget     |   |   |   |
| 14. Dr. Thomas Wharton   |   |   |   |
| 15. Dr. William Conyers  |   |   | Member of the Royal College<br>of Physicians. |
| 16. Dr. O'Dowd           |   |   | }   |
| 17. Dr. Samuel Peck      |   |   |   |
| 18. John Fife            |   |   |   |
| 19. Thomas Gray          |   |   |   |
| 20. Edward Hannan        |   |   |   |
| 21. Edward Higgs         |   |   |   |

And yet a few beside these, whose names are inscribed on no human document, but whose deeds are imprinted in

<sup>1</sup> *Researches into the Laws and Phenomena of Pestilence.*



imperishable type on the deathless record of righteous human endeavour.

Nathaniel Hodges<sup>1</sup> shows us something of the daily life of a physician in the course of this plague. He himself rose early, took his antipestilential dose, attended to the affairs of his household, and then repaired to his consulting room, where crowds awaited him. Some, who were sick, he treated, others he reassured and sent away. Breakfast followed, then visits to patients at their homes. On entering a house he would vaporize some aromatic disinfectant on a charcoal brazier: if he arrived out of breath, he would rest a while, and then place a lozenge in his mouth, before proceeding to the examination of his patients. After a round of several hours' duration, he would return home, drink a glass of sack, and then dine on roast meat and pickles or some similar condiments, all of which were reputed antidotal. More wine followed the preliminary curtain-raiser. Afternoon and evening, till eight or nine o'clock, were devoted to a second round of visits. His late hours he spent at home, a stranger to noxious fumes of tobacco, quaffing sack, to ensure cheerfulness and certainty of sleep. Twice the fatal infection seemed to have slipped past his outposts, but Hodges had still his remedy: he merely doubled the dose.

Of all the literature of pestilence none has been more widely read than Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year*: all later records take their colour from Defoe. Nevertheless, a careful study and comparison of other contemporary accounts leaves little room for doubt that Defoe's picture does not accurately represent the general state of London during the plague. His picture is far more true of Marseilles in 1720 than of London in 1665, and in this connexion one should remember that he had sedulously collected materials for a diary of the plague of Marseilles, which have been printed in some editions of his works. These can hardly

<sup>1</sup> *Loimologia*, and *Dict. of Nat. Biog.*

have failed to colour his *Journal*, which was not submitted to the public till 1722, two years after the plague of Marseilles.

Defoe himself was but six years old at the time of the plague, so that his own childish memories can have aided him but little in his task. He will have had, at most, a dim recollection of some hideous catastrophe, round which ranged tales of parents and friends in his boyhood. To these he will have added facts and incidents borrowed from the chief records available in print. Intrinsic evidence goes to show that these were three: London's *Dreadful Visitation*, Hodges's *Loimologia*, and Vincent's *God's Terrible Voice in the City*. The first of these will have given him the Bills of Mortality and other general information: the second, the aspect of the plague from a physician's point of view: the third, a vision of the plague as it appealed to popular imagination.

That Defoe intended to write history and not fiction; there is no reason to doubt. Judged only by the accuracy of his facts it is history, but it is in the facts that he omits, just because he had never heard of them, that he unconsciously lapses into fiction. Comparison of details and incidents with the unimpeachable record of Pepys confirms his accuracy, but it shows also that, by separating incidents from their surroundings and by compressing his description to the exclusion of all but selected incidents, the picture, as a whole, does not accurately represent the aspect of the city, as it was. Pepys, who was an actual eyewitness, has noted not only the most striking events but those of everyday commonplace interest, so that his narrative is far more true to life. Defoe, on the other hand, has removed his picture from its setting. Pepys shows us that, though the spectre of plague was everywhere, everyday life went on, though in subdued fashion. Defoe would have us believe that all activity was paralysed.



For all this, however, as one reads the *Journal* the narrative has such an air of verisimilitude, that one instinctively pictures the writer as describing what he has seen with his own eyes, so perfect is the illusion. Mead, indeed, himself an authority on the plague and so soon after the event, believed that the *Journal* was the authentic record of an eyewitness. Defoe's faculty of visualizing what he has not seen is inferior only to the vividness with which he describes what he has visualized.

What is the secret of this vividness? More than all else, extreme simplicity of language. The simple style was Defoe's natural style, and for that reason his use of it is fluent and easy, and knowing this he fitly puts his story into the mouth of a simple saddler. Defoe wrote for a growing class of readers of a lowly social order. He is the apostle of the common people: that is why he imitates their way of speaking. Not only is his narrative colloquial, but it deliberately affects the language a saddler would use in reciting to his intimates the memories of what he had lived through. There is no striving for dramatic effect, no drawing of lurid pictures, no literary artifice, but always the same sustained simplicity of diction, even in describing the most appalling occurrences. There must be no chance of missing the smallest point, so he even does such thinking as is necessary by running comments on his own story.

The educated reader, particularly in these days, when even literature is administered in tabloid form, must needs be wearied by the prolixity, and irritated by the redundancy of the narrative. But again it must be pleaded in extenuation that these very defects are deliberate. Constant repetition, as every teacher knows, sooner or later penetrates the densest brain.

But the *Journal* is something more than a mere chronicle, vivid enough at that, of what happened, and how men behaved, during the plague. Defoe regards the plague as

the judgement of God, and this attitude imparts a strong moral purpose to the work. This is why he dwells so much on the mental and moral effects of the catastrophe, inculcating his lesson without the appearance of undue insistence. Pepys, as we know, could find heart to make merry during the plague, just as Boccaccio depicted his company of Florentines: to Defoe the mere idea of merriment is revolting. Pepys, on New Year's Eve, as he looked back over the abomination of desolation, could make this entry in his *Diary*:

'December 31, 1665. I have never lived so merrily (besides that I never got so much) as I have done this plague time . . . and great store of dancings we have had at my cost (which I am willing to indulge myself and wife) at my lodgings. The great evil of this year, and the only one indeed, is the fall of my Lord of Sandwich, whose mistake about the prizes hath undone him.'

Pepys was a stranger to imagination: his pleasures and his griefs were things of the surface and matters of the moment. His creed is egoistic hedonism in all its naked brutishness. He is far more concerned over the fire, where there is a chance of losing his property, than over the plague where the chance is of losing his life. His New Year's Eve retrospect is not the only glimpse he gives us of callous indifference to the horrors of the plague. Look at September 30, 1665; when the fiercest spell was only just past:

'So to sleep with a good deal of content, and saving only this night and a day or two about the same business a month or six weeks ago, I do end this month with the greatest content, and may say that these three months, for joy, health, and profit, have been much the greatest that ever I received in all my life, having nothing upon me but the consideration of the sickliness of the season during this great plague to mortify mee. For all which the Lord God be praised!'

It was not that Pepys was unconscious of the terrible scenes of suffering around him, only that he was unmoved



by them. Into one short letter to Lady Cartaret, at the height of the plague, he compresses all the grim details that fill a volume for Defoe.

'Historians frequently lay it down that the fire of London swept away the plague. As a fact it probably had little to do with its departure. Several English towns were as hard hit as London, and yet in the absence of any conflagration subsidence and disappearance of plague followed the same course as in London. At Salonica,<sup>1</sup> about A.D. 1500, a fire which destroyed 8,000 houses was actually followed by an outbreak of plague. It was a common contemporary belief that the departure of plague from London was hastened by the coming of pit-coal into general use, so that the atmosphere was constantly permeated by sulphurous fumes.

Records in art of the Great Plague of London, though numerous, are mostly unimportant. Generally artists have been content to illustrate its copious literature. In 1863 Frederic Shields commenced an intended series of illustrations of the *Journal* of Defoe. Ruskin lavished great praise on the woodcuts, for their imaginative power and for the superlative excellence of the design. Proofs of six of these woodcuts were to be seen at the Memorial Exhibition of the works of Shields (Alpine Club, September-October 1911). The set of six comprised the following scenes :

i. *The Decision of Faith*

A man is seated at a table, on which lies a Bill of Mortality, with his Bible open before him. He says to himself, 'Well I know not what to do, Lord direct me.' His finger points to the answer in the open Bible : 'Because thou hast made the Lord, which is my refuge, even the most High, thy habitation : there shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling.'

2. *The Death of the First-born*

A youth lies in convulsions on a bed, while a woman kneels beside it. In the background are bearers carrying

<sup>1</sup> Rabbi Joshua, ii. 403.

away a corpse : both are smoking pipes. On the ground lies an hour-glass.

3. *Solomon Eagle warning the Impenitent*

Solomon Eagle stands with a brazier of live coals on his head in a fierce preaching attitude before a group of lewd young women at an open window.

4. *The End of a Refugee*

A man with a long hooked pole is dragging a corpse along. Beside him stands a grave-digger with spade, dog, and dinner-basket.

5. *The Plague Pit*

Bodies are being shot from a cart into a pit by the light of a torch, which a man is holding.

6. *Escape of an Imprisoned Family*

The door of a house has been hacked down, and is lying on a dead body.

George Cruickshank contributed four plates to Brayley's edition of the *Journal of the Plague Year*. Three of them, the 'Dead Cart', the 'Great Pit in Aldgate', and 'Solomon Eagle' are vivid and powerful ; the fourth, 'The Waterman's Wife', feeble and commonplace.

The preaching of Solomon Eagle is the subject of a picture by P. F. Poole, R.A., in the Mappin Gallery at Sheffield. The scene depicted is taken from Harrison Ainsworth's novel *Old Saint Paul's*. It shows Solomon Eagle, with the brazier of live coals on his head, nude but for a loin-cloth, and discoursing to the terrified citizens outside old St Paul's Cathedral, during the plague. All around are strewn bodies of dead and dying : a house displays the damning red cross and the words 'Lord have mercy upon us'. In the background bearers are carrying away a corpse to burial.

An incident, that Pepys describes in his *Diary* under September 3, 1665, as follows, is represented in a modern picture by Miss Florence Reason.



'Among other stories, one was very passionate, methought, of a complaint brought against a man in the towne for taking a child from London from an infected house. Alderman Hooker told us it was the child of a very able citizen in Gracious Street, a saddler, who had buried all the rest of his children of the plague, and himself and his wife now being shut up and in despair of escaping, did desire only to save the life of this little child: and so prevailed to have it received stark-naked into the arms of a friend, who brought it (having put it into new fresh clothes) to Greenwich; where, upon hearing the story, we did agree it should be permitted to be received and kept in the towne.'

In 1679 a terrible epidemic of plague broke out in Vienna, then an opulent city, with a population of some 210,000, and the seat of Leopold, the Holy Roman Emperor. Our chief knowledge of the visitation is derived from Sorbait (*Consilium medicum oder freundliches Gespräch*), Abraham a St. Clara (Merk's *Wien*), and Fuhrmann (*Alt- und Neu-Wien*). The disease was preceded by an epidemic of the 'Hot Sickness', (*Hitzige Krankheit*), which was very fatal. Bubonic plague followed in its wake and Vienna presented the spectacle of one huge lazaretto for the sick, one gigantic plague-pit for the dead. Convicts, as at Naples, were employed both to nurse the sick and bury the dead. Clothing, furniture, and bedding lay littered in the streets mixed with the dead and dying. When carts failed, the bodies were thrown into the Danube. A Plague Committee strove in vain to shut up all infected houses and segregate the inmates in lazarettos and stations of quarantine. Death by public hanging was the penalty of disobedience. Some of the royal princes, and foremost among them Prince Ferdinand of Schwartzenburg, together with many of the nobility, devoted themselves courageously to fighting the plague, undertaking even the most menial duties. But many of the citizens and the Emperor himself fled. Leopold conceived his obligations to his people discharged by a pilgrimage to Maria-Zell to pray for cessation

of the plague. Then he moved his court to Prague, whence plague drove him to Linz.

During the plague the Viennese set up a wooden column, to which frequent processions were made, observing the ancient ritual of the Flagellants. At the end of the plague Leopold made a vow at St. Stephan's to replace it by a marble column, which was duly erected in the Graben between 1687-93.

An incident of this plague, the story of the street-singer Augustin, who was thrown alive, but drunk, into the plague-pit, but escaped none the worse for his experience, recalls the like occurrence in Defoe. The man is said to have composed the familiar 'O du lieber Augustin' in a beer-house on the very night he was thrown into the plague-pit.

Amulets of various kinds were extensively employed in the seventeenth century. In South Germany a common form was the so-called Pest Penny. These had on one face, as a rule, the figure of St. Benedict or St. Zacharias, and on the reverse some formula of exorcism.

Vienna<sup>1</sup> fell a victim to outbreak after outbreak of plague, but the experience gained in the visitation of 1679 enabled the authorities to stamp out the infection in 1691 and 1709, before it had grown out of hand. But in 1713 all preventive measures failed to check its spread. Then, in the month of May, processions and litanies were organized to the plague column. The Emperor Charles VI remained in Vienna, and pronounced a solemn vow in St. Stephan's, that if the plague ceased he would erect a church as a thank-offering. Such was the origin of the Karlskirche. This church is a rich square edifice with a huge dome. It is the *chef-d'œuvre* of J. B. Fischer von Erlach, commenced in 1715. The ravages of the plague are portrayed in relief, by Stanetti, in the tympanum. Flanking the portico are two domed belfries, resembling Trajan's column, 108 feet high, with

<sup>1</sup> Krafft-Ebing, *Geschichte der Pest in Wien*.



reliefs from the life of S. Carlo Borromeo by Mader and Schletter. In March 1714, when the plague died out after a total mortality of 120,000, a thanksgiving *Te Deum* was sung in St. Stephan's, at which the emperor was present. Two series of memorial coins were struck, the one showing the votive column, the other the church dedicated to S. Carlo Borromeo.

The Plague Regulations, published in separate form at Vienna at the time of this epidemic, give a good idea of current popular opinion as to the nature of plague. There was no lack of adherents for each belief of every preceding period. There were those who regarded it as a signal evidence of God's displeasure. There were those who attributed it to poison in the air or food, generated in the stars and spread by the malice of grave-diggers for their own purposes. Even the Jews were incriminated. There were those who read its origin in the conjunction of certain stars. Others ascribed it to famines, to poisonous fumes set free by earthquakes, to comets, and even to dry seasons through the multiplication of insects. Come how it might, clouds taking the form of biers and funeral processions, noises in churchyards, and dreary sounds in the air foretold its coming. On infected bodies the virus was often visible as blue sulphurous fumes. There were clearly also some who conceived a natural origin. A doctor, named Gregorovius, dissected three dead bodies in search of the cause, but failed to find it. His intrepid zeal was duly rewarded by the Emperor and by the Faculty of Medicine in Vienna.

Conformably with the varying conceptions of cause, remedies were varied and multifarious. Some pinned their faith to a devout life, aided by processions and penitential sermons. Some lit fires to cleanse the air, at times adding sulphur. A host of herbs, chief among them Angelica, enjoyed repute as antipestilential remedies. The simple life appealed to some, purgatives and blood-letting to others.

But side by side with this ill-assorted medley of measures, a code of sanitary precautions had slowly grown up. Early notification by the doctors, quarantine of suspects and segregation of the sick, cleanliness and disinfection were all recommended and sedulously executed, and supplied in embryo the essential principles of modern sanitary science. Doctors were enjoined to keep sober, to fumigate themselves, and to wear silk or taffetas, to which the virus would not cling. We have arrived indeed at the parting of the ways, and henceforth the stream of medical science, polluted less and less by the surface waters of superstition, flows on clear and full in its appointed channel. The sun of science emerges at length from its protracted winter solstice.



## CHAPTER XIII

IN the year 1720 plague found its way to Marseilles. It was believed to have been brought by a ship, the *Grand-Saint-Antoine*, which arrived on May 25 from the Levant. As usual, the attempt was made to hush it up for the sake of trade. At the beginning of August something had to be done, so on the advice of two physicians, Sicard, father and son, it was decided to light bonfires throughout the city. For lack of firewood this was not done, but also for lack of faith, for it was found that despite their vaunted specific, the Sicards had fled the city. So sulphur was served out to the poor instead, wherewith to 'perfume' their houses.

As early as August 2 the Town Council found it necessary to adopt special measures to keep physicians and surgeons to their task. Accordingly, they decided that the city should pay them a fixed salary in place of fees from the sick, and allow them smocks of oiled cloth, and sedan chairs to carry them on their rounds. There are several illustrations extant of the dress adopted by doctors in the plague of Marseilles. The same dress, with trifling variations, was worn elsewhere in France, in Switzerland; and in Germany, and had originated in Italy. It is shown in an old Venetian woodcut of A.D. 1493, from the works of Joannes de Ketham (*Fasciculus Medicinæ*, 1493). This woodcut shows a physician in a long overall, but wearing only a skull-cap on his head, visiting a plague patient in bed. He is accompanied by attendants who carry lighted torches, while he himself holds a medicated sponge before his mouth and nose, as he feels the pulse. Grillot figured the dress as the frontispiece of his *Lyon affligé de la peste 1629*, and Manget<sup>1</sup> has borrowed it from

<sup>1</sup> *Traité de la Peste*, 2 vols., Genève, 1721; *Johns Hopkins Hospital Bulletin*, August 1898.



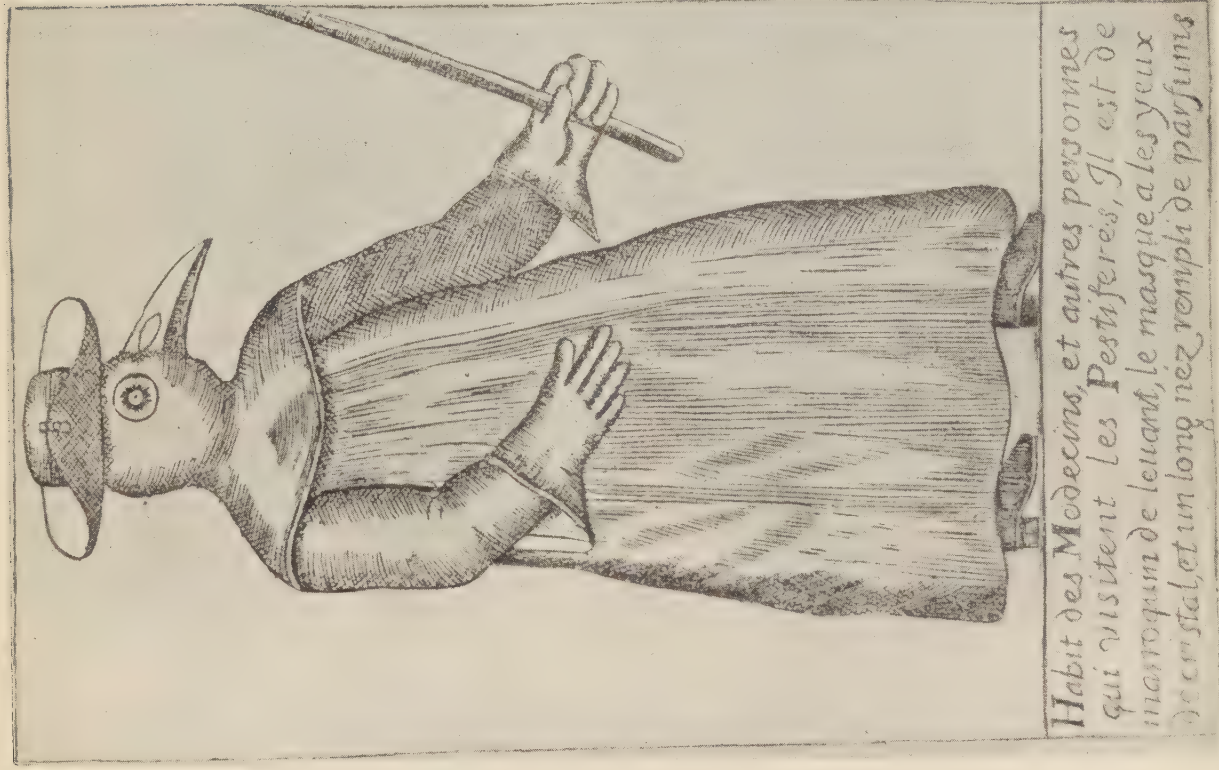


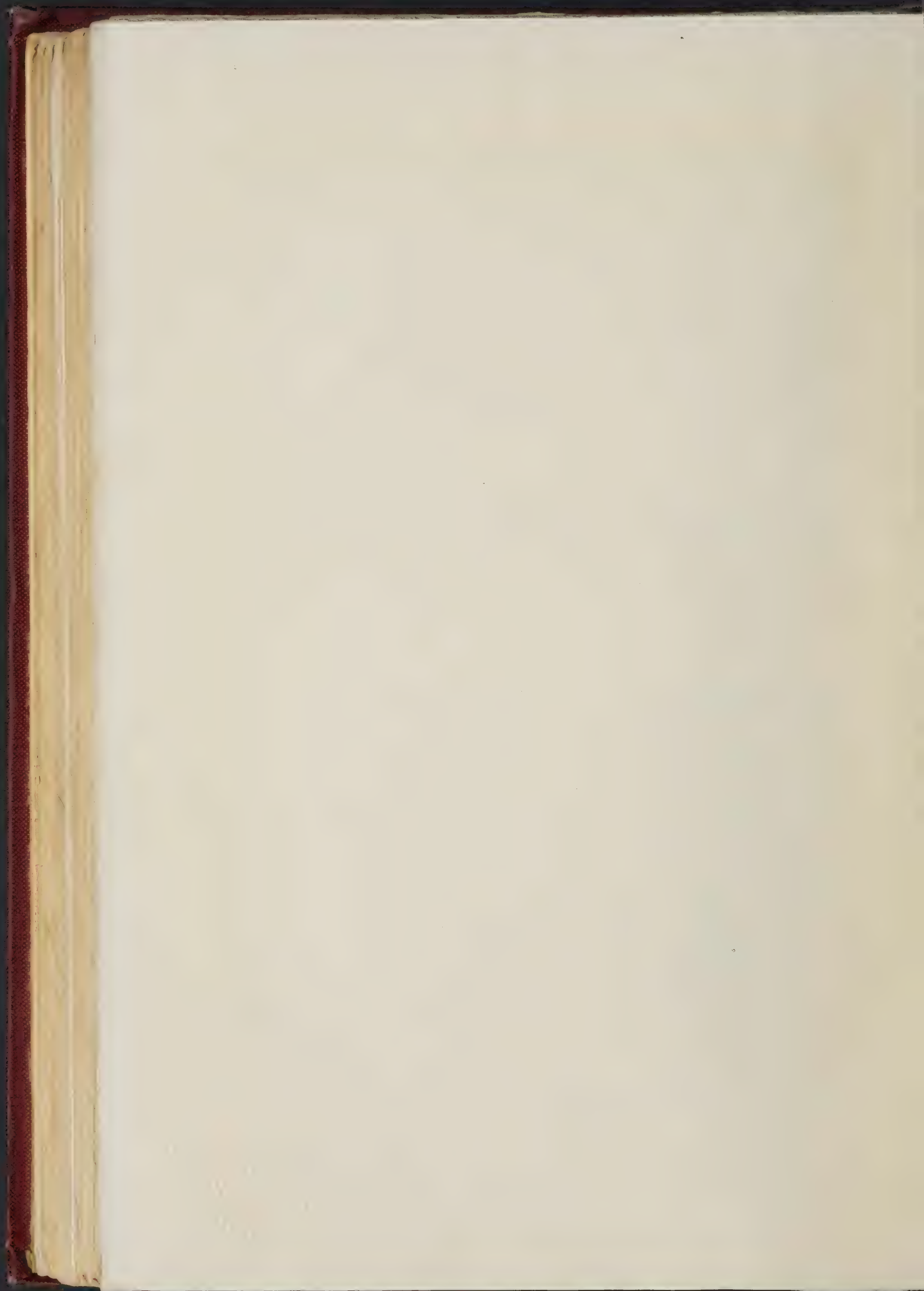
PLATE XXVIII, 1. DRESS OF A  
MARSEILLES DOCTOR, 1720

(Face Page 200)



PLATE XXVIII, 2. GERMAN  
CARICATURE OF THE SAME





him. From his description it would seem that the mantle, breeches, shirt, boots, gloves, and hat were all of morocco leather. The beak attached to the mask was filled with aromatics, over which the air passed in respiration, and had an aperture for each eye, fitted with a disk of crystal.

M. Reber<sup>1</sup> describes an engraving by John Melchior Fuesslin, representing a doctor in the plague of Marseilles. The legend beneath it, in German, is (translated) 'Sketch of a Cordovan-leather-clad doctor of Marseilles, having also a nose-case filled with smoking material to keep off the plague. With the wand he is to feel the pulse.' Reber's and Manget's plates are both reproduced in the *Bristol Medico-Chirurgical Journal*, March 1898, from the *Janus* blocks. Gaffarel<sup>2</sup> gives the costumes both of a doctor and of a hospital attendant: they closely resemble the dress of the Italian charitable guilds of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

By August 9 some of the physicians and almost all the master-surgeons had fled, and an ordinance was issued demanding their return, or in default their expulsion from their respective corporations, and other special penalties as well. Two physicians named Gayon volunteered their services for the Hôpital des Convalescents, but forthwith paid the penalty with their lives. In the absence of sufficient physicians in Marseilles, others were summoned from Montpellier, Paris, and elsewhere. These exhausted their energies in a dispute over the contagious character of plague. Chicoyneau and Chirac maintained that it was not contagious. Deidier proved, by successfully inoculating dogs with bile taken from plague subjects, that at any rate it was communicable. Each subsequently expounded his views in a formal discourse before the School of Montpellier.

Existing hospital accommodation was quite unequal

<sup>1</sup> *Janus*, 1897, p. 297; and *Johns Hopkins Hospital Bulletin*.

<sup>2</sup> *La Peste de 1720*, p. 96.



to the needs. Emergency tents were erected outside the town, with mattresses for the sick. Chevalier Rose equipped and maintained a hospital in the district entrusted to him, at his own expense. A large temporary hospital of timber covered with sail-cloth was hurriedly erected, but when almost finished towards the end of September it was blown down by a gale, and was not rebuilt till October 4. This hospital, together with the Hôpital Général de la Charité of 800 beds, provided ultimately sufficient accommodation, so that none need remain in the streets.

From the first the mortality was such that it was wellnigh impossible to bury the dead. On August 8 the Assembly resolved that carts should be used to carry the dead to burial, and that pits should be dug in which the bodies could be buried in lime. So two huge pits were dug outside the walls, between the gate of Aix and that of Joliette, M. Moustier overseeing the diggers and compelling them to work. Chevalier Rose also had pits dug and organized a corps of buriers in his own district. The duties of burial were at first entrusted to sturdy beggars, but in a brief space of time the supply of these failed, so that bodies began to accumulate in the houses and streets. Then convicts were requisitioned in relays from time to time.

These convicts were promised their liberty, to excite them to work—a promise that was never fulfilled in the case of the few who survived the task. Their ignorance of the management of carts and horses, their idleness and lust of robbery rendered them so unfit for the task, that Moustier and the other sheriffs and Chevalier Rose were compelled to be always present on horseback, to superintend the work. By August 21 corpses had already begun to accumulate in old parts of the city, where the streets were too narrow and steep for the carts to go. Accordingly, an order was issued that the vaults of the churches in the upper town should be used for burials in quicklime, and that, when full, they

should be sealed up with cement. By the end of August the streets were literally strewn with dead bodies, some in an advanced stage of putrefaction, mingled with cats and dogs that had been killed, and bedding thrown out from the houses. The square in front of the building called the Loge, as also the Palissadoes of the port, were filled with bodies brought ashore from ships in the roadstead, to which whole families had fled in the belief that plague would not reach them on the water.

By September 6 more than 2,000 dead bodies were lying in the streets, exclusive of those in the houses. On the esplanade called La Tourette, lying towards the sea between the houses and the rampart, 1,000 corpses had lain rotting for weeks in the sun and emitting a frightful stench. They were too rotten even to be lifted into carts, and too foul to be carried to distant pits. Chevalier Rose, mindful maybe of Procopius, conceived the idea of throwing them into two huge vaults in the old bastions close to the esplanade, after breaking in their roofs. The task was carried out in fierce haste by 100 galley-slaves, who tied handkerchiefs dipped in vinegar over their mouths and noses. At the same time fishermen netted 10,000 dead dogs floating in the port and towed them out to sea.

In the parish of St. Ferriol, the finest quarter of the city, Michel Serre the painter undertook to see to the burial of the dead, with carts and galley-slaves placed at his disposal, himself providing food and lodging for the workers. A grateful city has repaid him by hanging his two large pictures of Marseilles during the plague close beneath the ceiling of an underground cellar, where it is impossible to decipher their details.

When all the bodies were disposed of, the sheriffs employed the galley-slaves to clear the filth from the streets and throw it into barges, which carried it out to sea.

In the early days of the epidemic, the sheriffs had



forbidden the annual procession on August 16, in honour of St. Roch, at which the saint's bust and relics were carried through the streets; but the people raised such an outcry that the procession was celebrated, the sheriffs attending with their halberdiers to prevent a crowd following. By September 7 even the civil authorities had come to regard the plague as an instrument of God's wrath, and the magistrates, to appease it, vowed that every year the city should give 2,000 livres to a House of Charity, to be established under the protection of our Lady of Good Help, for orphans of the province.

At the height of the plague many parish priests and some of the monks fled: the services of the Church were mostly suspended. But many secular clergy and monks remained and devoted themselves unflinchingly to the sick. The bishop, Belsunce, nobly played his part. Wherever the poorest lay, there he went confessing, consoling, and exhorting them to patience. To the dying he carried the Sacrament, to the destitute the whole of his money in alms. Though plague invaded his palace and carried off those about him, it spared him. It is of him that Pope<sup>1</sup> asks,

Why drew Marseilles' good Bishop purer breath  
When nature sickened, and each gale was death?

On All Saints' Day, Belsunce headed a procession through the streets from his palace, walking barefoot, as Borromeo of old, with a halter about his neck, and carrying the cross in his arms. He wished to appear among his people as a scapegoat laden with their sins, and as a victim destined to expiate them. Accompanied by the priests and canons of the Church he led the way to a place where an altar had been erected. There, after exhorting the people to repentance, he celebrated Mass before them all. Then he solemnly consecrated the city to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, in honour

<sup>1</sup> *Essay on Man*, iv. 107-8.

of which he had instituted a yearly festival. The tears coursing down his face as he spoke moved all to cry aloud to the Lord for mercy. On November 16 Belsunce was emboldened to exorcise the waning plague. Calling together all that remained of the clergy to the church of Acoulles, he read all the prayers that the Pope had prescribed for deliverance from plague. Then after an eloquent and moving exhortation he carried up the Holy Sacrament to the cathedral's roof, and there, under the open sky, with all the city lying before him, uttered a solemn benediction, and performed the full ritual of exorcism according to the forms of the Roman Catholic Church.

Belsunce was not the first human scapegoat to tread the streets of Marseilles in voluntary expiation for its people. In times of pestilence, in the old Greek colony of Massilia, one of the lower orders offered himself on behalf of his fellow citizens. Dressed in sacred garments and decked with sacred boughs he was led through the streets, amid the prayers of the people that their ills might fall on him, and then cast out of the city.

There stands this day on a lofty crest of land in the open square, right in front of the episcopal palace of Marseilles, a statue of Belsunce in bronze, by Ramus. The stone pedestal bears a commemorative inscription and two reliefs in bronze. In one, Marseilles in woman's form is lying among her stricken children, while Belsunce and his attendant priests implore the Sacred Heart to stay the plague. In the other, Belsunce bears the Sacrament to sick and dying.

The statue of Belsunce, clad in full episcopal robes, stands with face raised and arms outstretched to heaven, in attitude of earnest supplication. Before him Nature has set a landscape of surpassing beauty: sea, earth, and sky give freely of their best. Far down below a polyglot people move hither and thither around the harbour quays, like ants, at their appointed tasks. Beyond it spreads a matchless



expanse of Mediterranean sea, now smooth and silvery as a mirror, now fretful with the rising tide. Away over the sea and over the low land that bounds the bay, the evening sun lights up the face of Belsunce with a last lingering radiance, as it goes down to its setting in a glory of golden hues. If man's graven image may enjoy the perfect happiness denied to man, then surely Belsunce has his reward.

Marseilles is rich in reminiscence of her bishop. In the Bureau d'Intendance Sanitaire hangs a pleasing portrait of Belsunce by Gobert; while in the Musée may be seen a poor picture, by Mansian, of him giving the Sacrament to the victims of the plague. François Gérard (1770-1837) presented his 'Peste de Marseille' to the Bureau d'Intendance Sanitaire, where now it hangs. The wan dismal colouring of the picture accords ill with the striking vigour of the composition. In the foreground is set forth the whole tragedy of a family stricken with plague. On the ground lies the father writhing with agony: his hands are clenched, his eyes are starting from their sockets: the dressing in the right armpit indicates one site of the disease. The mother, seated on a chest, clasps to her body her elder boy, wrapped in a blanket, too weak to stand: the younger child leans against his mother, his eyes fixed in terror on his dying father. Anguish is depicted in the death-like pallor of the mother's face. In the background Belsunce in full robes distributes to the sick and starving poor the bread which an attendant is carrying. To the left of the foreground bodies of the dead are lying huddled up beneath an awning, while to the right convicts are dragging corpses away for burial. The sublime serenity of the good bishop seems to bring to his stricken people in their anguish some promise of that peace which passeth all understanding.

J. F. de Troy the younger (1679-1752), himself an eyewitness of this plague, painted a masterly picture, which is now in the city Musée. It was executed for Chevalier





PESTE DE MARSEILLE. BY FRANÇOIS GÉRARD  
Photograph by Giraudon, Paris

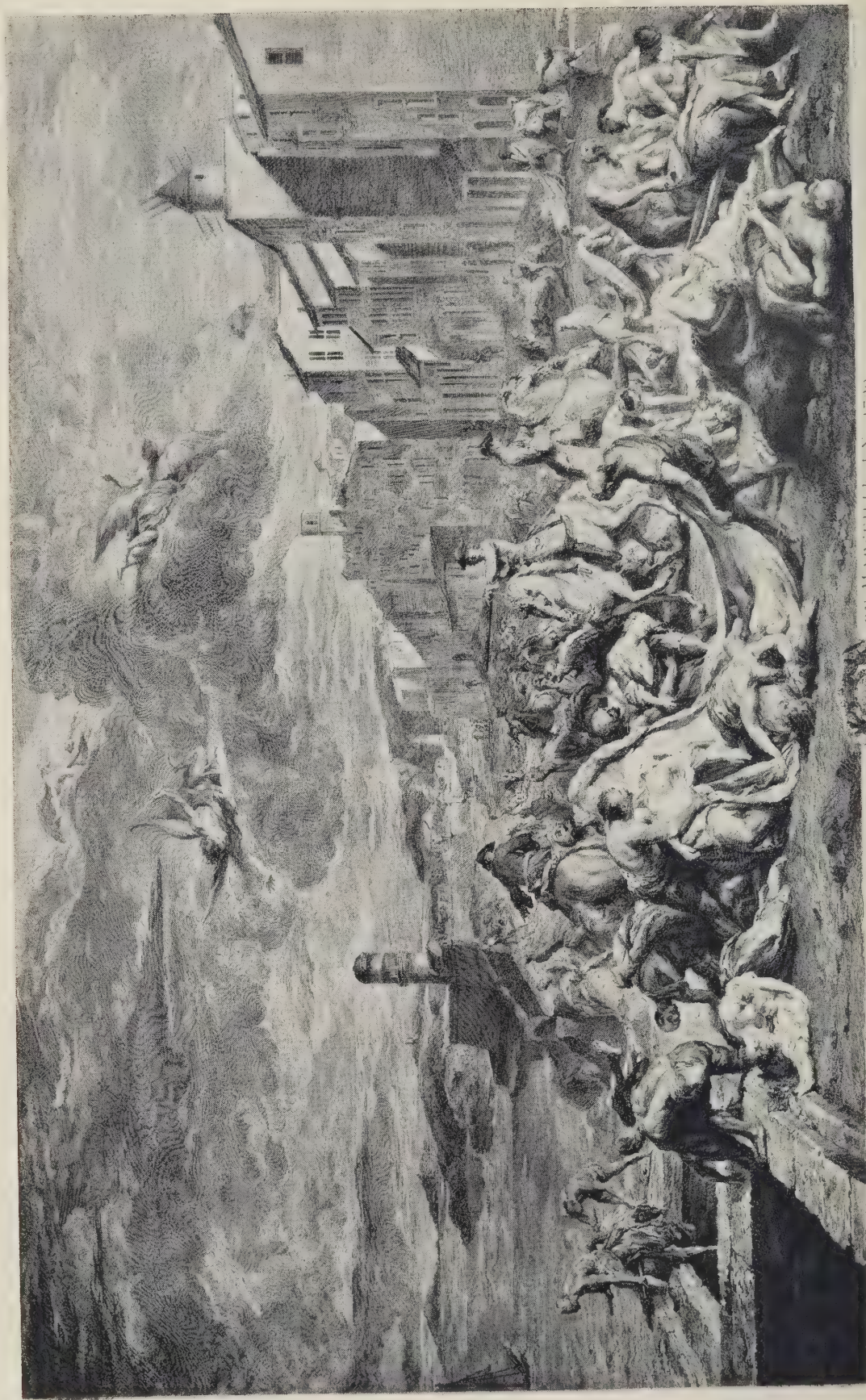


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THE  
LIBRARY  
OF THE  
MUSEUM  
OF  
COMPARATIVE ZOOLOGY  
AND ANATOMY  
HARVARD UNIVERSITY  
CAMBRIDGE, MASS.







LA PESTE DANS LA VILLE DE MARSEILLE EN 1720



DE MARSEILLE EN 1720



Rose in 1722. It depicts him seated on a white horse calmly directing the work of the convicts, who have been assigned to him, as they clear the esplanade of La Tourette of the accumulation of decomposing corpses. The sheriffs, also on horseback, aid the Chevalier in his task. The ground is strewn with corpses, which the convicts seize and hurl into the gaping mouths of the open vaults in the bastions. They work in furious haste, impelled by the foul odour of the bodies and the knowledge of the hazard of their task. Ferocity is depicted in their faces, haste in all the movements of their bodies. The whole scene is full of life and movement and spirit. In the sky hover angels shaking flaming torches. The colouring has been managed with wonderful effect to convey the feeling that sky and earth alike are filled with a poisonous and sickly miasma.

In another picture in the Santé at Marseilles Guérin has treated the same subject in a dull conventional manner. Chevalier Rose, bearing the dead body of a woman, fills the centre of the picture. Behind him a ludicrous boy is holding a white horse with one hand, and his nose with the other, and is bestowing on his nose a tenacious grip that would have been more appropriately bestowed on the horse. Convicts are dragging away the dead bodies that litter the ground.

The two large pictures by Michel Serre are of interest rather as pictorial records of old Marseilles, than as contributions to the artistic presentation of plague. One represents the Cours de Marseille, now known as the Cours Belsunce, during the plague. It is a handsome boulevard bordered on either side by trees, beneath which are seen tents hastily erected as temporary dwellings by those who have fled from their plague-contaminated dwellings to the shelter of the streets. Death and disease have followed them and are rampant on every side. Buriers are seen collecting the dead and carrying them off in carts. This picture has been engraved by Rigaud, and is figured in Crowle's *Illustrated*



*Pennant's London*, vol. x, p. 93; also in Gaffarel's *La Peste de 1720*, p. 304.

The other picture by Serre shows the open space in front of the Hôtel de Ville together with part of the port of Marseilles. The scenes resemble those of his other picture, and we are reminded also that many took refuge in boats and anchored off the harbour, in the vain belief that plague could not reach them there. The space before the Town Hall became one heap of decomposing bodies that were landed from the boats or had drifted ashore from the waters of the harbour. Crowle<sup>1</sup> figures this picture as well as the preceding, so, too, does Gaffarel.<sup>2</sup>

With the departure of plague from Marseilles, the disease had wellnigh disappeared from Europe. In the Levant it still flourished for a while. Patrick Russell, physician to the British factory at Aleppo, wrote a treatise on an epidemic that occurred during his residence there from 1760-2. Again, in 1771 it gained a footing at Moscow, claiming there no less than 80,000 victims. It was in vain that the people thronged the miraculous *ikon* of the Virgin at the Varvarka gate. Fearing the great concourse, the archbishop had the *ikon* removed to the Chudok monastery, but such was the fury of the maddened people, that they threatened to raze the building to the ground if the *ikon* were not restored. The archbishop yielded, but too late, for the mob dragged him from his monastery and massacred him in the open street. From that day the plague began to wane. So plague was banished from Europe by the worship of a picture, and with dramatic appropriateness the curtain fell on the final act in a scene of human sacrifice.

The celebrated picture 'Les Pestiférés de Jaffa' by Baron Gros, now in the Louvre, has been the subject of much acrimonious controversy. The picture was ordered by

<sup>1</sup> vol. x, p. 91.

<sup>2</sup> p. 214.



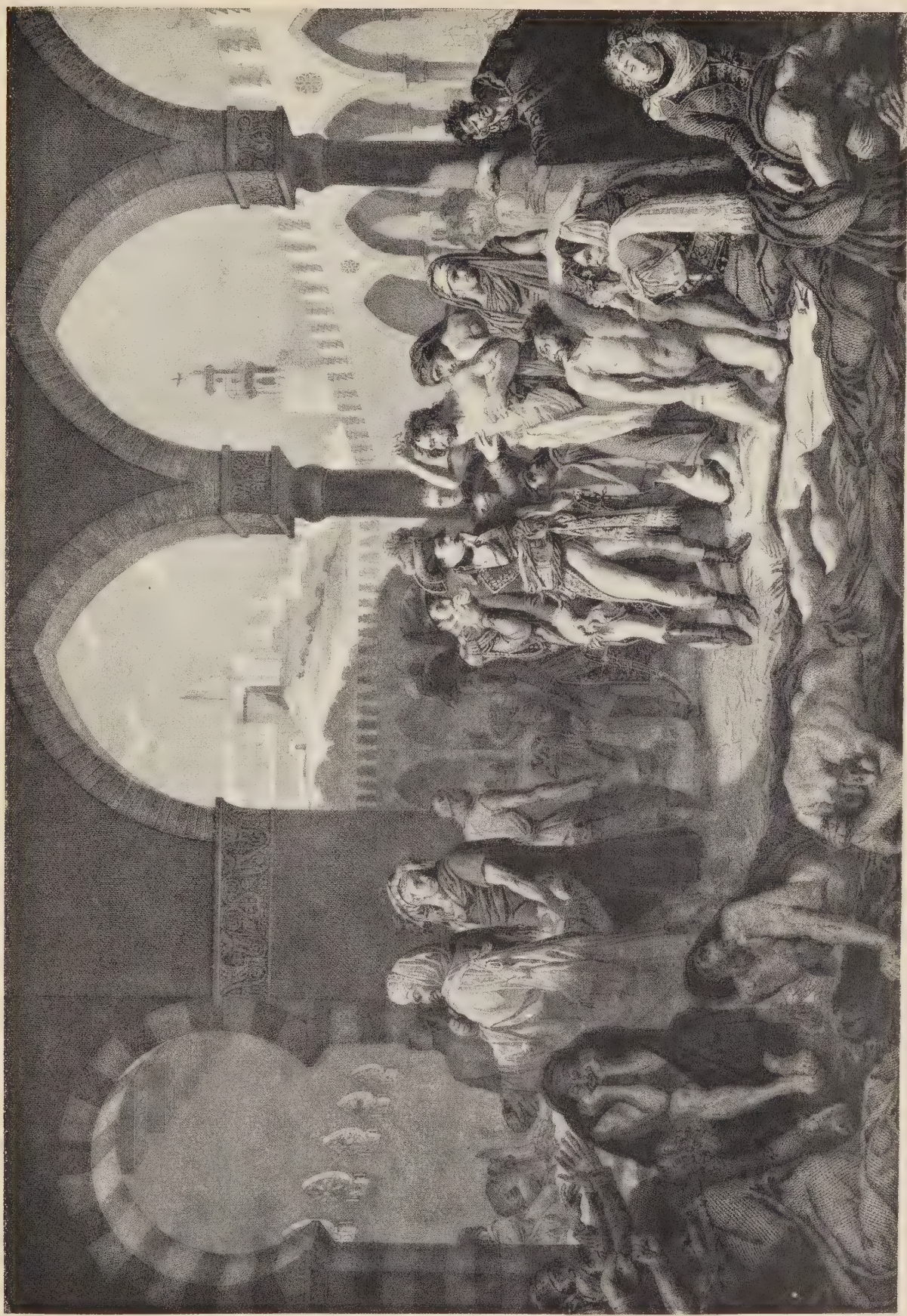


PLATE XXXI LES PESTIFÉRÉS DE JAFFA

By Baron Gros (Face Page 208)





Napoleon when First Consul, and excited extravagant enthusiasm on its exhibition in the Salon in 1804. Artists placed a palm-branch over it, and the public covered the whole frame with wreaths. It is, in fact, a large unattractive canvas, devoid of any exceptional merit either of composition or colour. It shows Napoleon accompanied by some of his staff standing among the plague-stricken soldiers in the interior of a mosque. One of the men is raising his right arm, so as to expose the bubo in his armpit, and Napoleon is laying his fingers on it.

There is also in existence a rough sketch,<sup>1</sup> which shows that Gros at the outset intended to present his subject differently. Napoleon, like St. Louis in the modern fresco in St. Sulpice, holds in his arms the body of a plague victim, which an Arab helps him to support. The general's impassive features contrast strongly with the frightened appearance of his attendants.

Each of these two representations would seem to be actual historical occurrences during Napoleon's campaign in Syria. Plague had broken out among the troops in Jaffa, where Napoleon had established a large hospital, and the generals had issued an alarming report as to its spread. It was Napoleon's purpose to restore the *moral* of his army, which had been seriously affected by the outbreak. Norvin<sup>2</sup> represents Napoleon as visiting all the wards, accompanied by the generals Berthier and Bezzières, the director-general Daure, and the head doctor Desgenettes. Napoleon spoke to the sick, encouraged them, and touched their wounds, saying, 'You see, it is nothing.' When he left the hospital, they blamed his imprudence. He replied coldly, 'It is my duty, I am the general-in-chief.' This studied indifference to the contagion, coupled with the fine behaviour of the head doctor Desgenettes, who inoculated himself with plague

<sup>1</sup> Richer, *L'Art et la médecine*.

<sup>2</sup> *Histoire de Napoléon*, ed. 1834, vol. i, p. 354.



in the presence of the soldiers and applied to himself the same remedies as he prescribed for them, successfully accomplished Napoleon's purpose. The account of the incident given in a letter<sup>1</sup> by Comte d'Aure is slightly different. It runs, 'He did more than touch the buboes: assisted by a Turkish orderly, General Buonaparte picked up and carried away a plague patient, who was lying across a doorway of one of the wards: we were much frightened at his acting thus, because the sick man's clothing was covered with foam and the disgusting discharge from a broken bubo. The general continued his visit unmoved and interested, spoke to the sick, and sought in addressing them with words of consolation, to dissipate the panic that the plague was casting on their spirits.' Bourrienne,<sup>2</sup> Napoleon's secretary, however, says, 'I walked by the general's side, and I assert that I never saw him touch any of the infected.'

The Duc de Rovigo in his *Memoirs* practically corroborates the Comte d'Aure. He says: 'In order to convince them by the most obvious proof that their apprehensions were groundless, he desired that the bleeding tumour of one of his soldiers should be uncovered before him, and pressed it with his own hands.' Desgenettes and General Andréossy, who were both present, confirm Rovigo and Comte d'Aure as against Bourrienne.

Napoleon's secretary carries the narrative a stage further. He says that only sixty of those in the hospital had plague, and that as their removal involved a risk of infecting the whole army, Napoleon deliberated with his staff and the medical men, and decided to put them out of their misery by poison. Bourrienne says that he does not know who administered the poison, but that there was no question of their destruction. Bourrienne's statements on any subject, as is generally recognized, need careful sifting, but out of the

<sup>1</sup> *Bourrienne et ses erreurs.*

<sup>2</sup> *Mémoires sur Napoléon.*

mass of conflicting testimony the plain fact would seem to emerge, that Napoleon did suggest that the death of some seven or eight, who were bound to die, should be accelerated, so that they might not infect the whole army. Napoleon himself, at St. Helena, did not deny this, and defended his action on the ground of humanity, stigmatizing the story of wholesale poisoning as an invention.



## APPENDIX<sup>1</sup>

THE statement of Thucydides, that all other diseases took on the similitude of the dominating pestilence, is one that reappears constantly in the literature of epidemic disease. We have already noted the frequent concurrence of plague and typhus, leading such acute observers as Diemerbroeck and Sydenham to believe that the one disease might be transformed into the other. The same close association of relapsing fever and typhus was constantly noted, and we know now that the explanation lies in the fact that each disease is transmitted by the body-louse, as plague is transmitted by the flea. Bearing in mind the close and constant association of these and other acute infectious fevers it is no matter for surprise that they should have been regarded as states and stages of one pestilential process, differing from one another, not in kind, but only in degree. As Bacon says, 'putrefaction rises not to its height at once.'

The acute, often abrupt, onset of the Athenian pestilence, with profound depression, severe headache, and suffused conjunctivae, though met with in a moiety of cases of plague, is eminently characteristic of typhus. The striking appearance of the bloodshot eyeballs has led to much confusion between the two diseases.

The aspect of the tongue and fauces inclines rather to the side of typhus. In each disease the tongue is at first heavily coated with a thick white fur, and tends later to become dry and parched. But in typhus there is a special tendency, as the disease advances, for the tongue to bleed from fissures at the edges. So frequently is this the case, that this feature has been regarded as of diagnostic value in the presence of an outbreak of typhus. A boggy reddened appearance of the fauces is usual in typhus, and is seen also in a proportion of plague patients.

<sup>1</sup> Curschmann's contribution, in Nothnagel's *Encyclopaedia of Practical Medicine*, is perhaps the most graphic and succinct account of Typhus Fever in modern medical literature. The record of Thucydides should be studied closely side by side with this. Murchison's article, in his *Treatise on Continued Fever*, though admirable, is so diffuse as to make comparison difficult.

Unnatural and even foetid breath may be met with in any acute infectious fever, but foetor is in no way characteristic of any. Doubtless it was far more common in times when the alphabet of oral hygiene had not yet found acceptance as a necessary detail of medical regimen. Murchison describes the breath of typhus patients as foetid, and in addition it is well known that a repulsive odour may be given off from their bodies. Salius Diversus mentioned it three centuries ago, and it has been a commonplace of many subsequent writers. Curschmann failed to detect it, and attributed its absence to the free ventilation of the sick wards. A layman, as Thucydides was, might well ascribe to the breath a foetor permeating the whole atmosphere around the patient.

Sneezing has long been associated in popular tradition with plague, and an old legend refers the association to the plague of Rome at the commencement of the pontificate of Gregory the Great, when it is said that those who sneezed died. The most careful and observant of modern physicians do not, however, confirm the connexion. Russell states that he was on the look out for it during the plague of Aleppo and did not observe it: Simpson does not even mention it. Nor does it appear to be noteworthy as a symptom either of typhus or of any other acute infectious fever, though it would be in accord with the swollen and congested state of the nasal mucosa in typhus, to which Curschmann has drawn special attention. Perhaps the tradition is a mere old wives' tale, for sneezing has been regarded as an ominous sign from great antiquity, and as far back at least as the composition of the *Odyssey*. Aristotle frankly confessed himself unable to explain the connexion.

Curschmann met with hoarseness and laryngeal catarrh commonly in typhus, but though catarrh of the whole respiratory tract may occur in plague, it is not an outstanding feature. Cough is frequent in either disease; so also is vomiting, often of great severity: and if protracted will exhibit a succession of changes of colour, such as Thucydides has described, first the food contents of the stomach, then green bilious vomit, and finally blood, either red or altered to brown or black. Hiccough and empty retching are liable to ensue on severe vomiting from any enduring cause.

It is not clear to what Thucydides appropriates the term



σπασμός: the context would suggest that spasm of the diaphragm, such as accompanies protracted vomiting, is indicated. But it may also signify true convulsions, which are an occasional complication of both diseases. Convulsive tremor of the limbs, and indeed of the whole body, is habitual at the height of typhus, and is not infrequent in plague.

We should naturally look to the appearance of the skin and of the eruption to afford criteria for a sure diagnosis, but such is not the case. True, there is a remarkable resemblance to Murchison's description of the skin of typhus patients, in an English hospital. 'The face', he says, 'is often flushed. The flushing is general over the entire face. It is never pink: sometimes it is reddish or reddish brown, but more commonly it is of a dusky, earthy, or leaden hue: in grave cases it may be livid.' No corresponding appearance of the skin is to be seen in plague.

Thucydides has described the eruption as consisting of *φλύκταιναι μικραὶ καὶ ἔλκη*, words that have generally been rendered as 'small blisters and ulcers', and for this reason have been held to exclude positively a diagnosis of typhus fever. So certain a conclusion is hardly justified by the facts. Outbreaks of gangrenous dermatitis, in which multiple bullae or blisters, leaving an ulcerated base, have broken out over the body surface, have been not uncommon features of a typhus epidemic, and from their virulently contagious character such outbreaks would have been more prone to occur amid all the neglect and destitution of a beleaguered garrison. Murchison has described the resulting appearances in the following words: 'I have seen bullae filled with light or dark fluid, or large pustules appear on various parts of the body during the progress of the fever. Stokes has observed bullae of this description followed after bursting by deep ulcers with sharp margins.' But extensive ulceration such as this must inevitably have left permanent scarring, at least as marked as the 'pitting' produced by small-pox, and we can hardly presume that this could have escaped the critical Greek eye of so keen an observer as Thucydides. The whole question arises of the exact significance of the words *ἔλκος* and *φλύκταινα*.

In his treatise *Περὶ Ἑλκῶν* Hippocrates uses the term *ἔλκος* not only for open wounds and ulcers, but also for burns, wheals, and wounds in general.

Homer uses it for wounds of every kind. It so happens that the wounds of the *Iliad* are almost all the open wounds produced by spear and arrow, but Homer also uses it for the bite of a snake<sup>1</sup> and for the wound inflicted by lightning.<sup>2</sup>

Bion<sup>3</sup> uses it in consecutive lines for the wound caused by a spear, and in the generic sense :

Ἄγριον, ἄγριον ἔλκος ἔχει κατὰ μηρὸν Ἀδωνις,  
μείζον δ' ἂν Κυθήρεια φέρει ποτικάρδιον ἔλκος.

Aeschylus<sup>4</sup> and Sophocles<sup>5</sup> use it also in the wider sense, as in

πόλει μὲν ἔλκος ἐν τῷ δήμῳ τυχεῖν,

and

τί γὰρ  
γένοιτ' ἂν ἔλκος μείζον ἢ φίλος κακός ;

The inference to be drawn from these passages is that ἔλκος, although usually indicating an open wound, is used with no precise significance.

The same difficulty attaches to the word φλύκταινα. Though Hippocrates uses the word frequently, there is no single passage in which the precise significance is clear beyond all doubt. He applies it to chilblains,<sup>6</sup> to an eruption on the skin of subjects of empyema,<sup>7</sup> to lesions appearing on the tongue in fatal septic cases, and so on. In one passage, in which he speaks of a φλύκταινα arising from rubbing the skin with vinegar, he seems to indicate a blister.

The first clear definition of the term we have is from the pen of Celsus, who defines it as a discoloured pustule that breaks and leaves an ulcerated base ('genus pustularum, cum plures similes varis oriuntur nonnunquam maiores, lividae aut pallidae aut nigrae aut aliter naturali colore mutato: subestque iis humor, ubi hae ruptae sunt, infra quasi exulcerata caro apparet'). There are several passages in Aristophanes, which indicate that he at any rate applied the term as we do to a blister lesion: but at the same time, there are other passages in which this exclusive use is by no means so sure. The lesion resulting from rowing<sup>8</sup> or carrying a lance<sup>9</sup> cannot well be other than a

<sup>1</sup> *Iliad* ii. 723.

<sup>2</sup> *Iliad* viii. 405 and 419.

<sup>3</sup> *Adonis*, 16-17.

<sup>4</sup> *Agamemnon*, 645.

<sup>5</sup> *Antigone*, 652.

<sup>6</sup> *On Ancient Medicine*, § 16.

<sup>7</sup> *Coacae Praenotiones*, § 396.

<sup>8</sup> *Frogs*, 236.

<sup>9</sup> *Wasps*, 1119.



blister. And there is a passage in the *Ecclesiastusae*,<sup>1</sup> which seems even clearer :

ἀλλ' ἔμπουσά τις  
ἐξ αἵματος φλύκταιναν ἡμφιεσμένη,

'Some vampire bloated with blood like a blister.' The image must be that of a vampire, so bloated with blood, that its body seems actually enveloped in it, simulating a blood-blister.

Aristotle applies the term to the bite of a shrew-mouse, which would presumably produce a solid local swelling, and not a blister. Procopius uses *φλύκταινα* for the black cutaneous lesions of Oriental plague, known nowadays as pustules : he says, too, that they were of the size of a lentil, but does not mention terminal ulceration. Procopius is so precise in his medical terminology, that it is improbable he borrowed the term from Thucydides without appreciating its exact significance : far more likely he adopted it from the medical terminology of his day.

There is something to be said for appropriating the terms used by Thucydides to the pustular lesions of Oriental plague. Many writers, ancient as well as modern, have described the so-called pustules as commencing in some cases as blisters and terminating in eroding ulcers. But, on the other hand, we know nothing of epidemics of plague without a considerable proportion of bubonic cases, while we do know from the narrative of Procopius that plague has maintained its characters unchanged for 1,500 years. In an epidemic of plague, in which death did not supervene till the seventh or ninth day the presence of buboes would be the outstanding feature of the disease, and Thucydides does not even mention them.

Assuming that typhus fever also has maintained its characters unchanged, and that the external manifestations of the Athenian pestilence were not of the exceptional type we have alluded to, but of the type habitually associated with the disease, can it reasonably be contended that the terms *φλύκταιναι* and *ἔλκη* are applicable to these ?

Murchison says that 'according to its colour, the eruption may be said to pass through three stages, viz. 1, Pale dirty pink or florid ; 2, reddish brown or rusty ; 3, livid or petechial'. In

<sup>1</sup> *Ecclesiastusae*, 1057.

the first stage, it is generally admitted that except on careful observation, and in a good light, the faint diffuse maculae (spots) are apt to escape detection, so that the impression is of a general suffusion of the skin—what in fact Thucydides terms *ὑπέρυθρον*.

In the second stage, the deeper coloration of the spots throws them into relief as individual lesions against the paler background of general suffusion of the skin. Can it be that this is indicated by the vague term *φλύκταινα*? Be it remembered that Thucydides was a layman, describing, as he says, the lesions of a hitherto unknown disease. Every physician is well aware of the restricted terminology that the laity possess for the description of multifarious lesions. Medicine itself is not exempt from the same confusion, for when physicians glibly speak of the subcutaneous haemorrhages of typhus as petechiae they forget that the word throws back to *petigo* (a scab).

There remains then for the third stage of the eruption—the haemorrhagic stage—the term *ἕλκος*, a generic term applicable to almost any lesion, and having no philological affinity to the Latin *ulcus*, and the English 'ulcer', with which medical usage has confused it.

Reviewing, then, all the facts, it cannot be held that the description of the eruption, as given by Thucydides, is sufficient to negative a diagnosis of typhus fever, which disease is otherwise depicted to the life in all else that he says of its clinical course and characters.

Thucydides was so impressed with the intensity of the internal fever, that he expected certainly to find a corresponding temperature of the body surface: hence his surprise is obvious at finding it not excessively hot. For all that, sufferers were ready to cast off every shred of clothing, till they were naked, and longed to throw themselves into cold water. Some did actually plunge into cisterns, but no amount of water sufficed to slake their thirst. Procopius mentions this same fierce longing to fling themselves into water among the plague victims of Byzantium, but raving delirium of this kind is far more characteristic of typhus than of plague. Curschmann depicts the fierce medley of wild ravings, mingled with frantic efforts at self-destruction, which give an unmistakable character to a ward of typhus patients. Murchison, quoting from Bancroft, says: 'Some leaving their beds would beat their keepers or nurses and



drive them from their presence: others, like madmen, would run about the streets, markets, lanes, and other places: and some again would leap headlong into deep waters.' Intolerable restlessness and insomnia fill up the cup of misery to overflowing. Curschmann confirms the observation of Thucydides, that typhus cadavers exhibit very little emaciation, but this does not help to differentiate typhus from other acute fevers of equally brief duration.

Death commonly occurred on the seventh or the ninth day. One recognizes here submission to the authoritative doctrine of critical days. Hippocrates<sup>1</sup> defined them on the basis of equal and unequal numbers:

Equal—4, 6, 8, 10, 14, 28, 30, 48, 60, 80, 100.

Unequal—5, 7, 9, 11, 17, 21, 27, 31.

Taking the mean of the numbers, the plague of Athens claimed its victims for the most part about the eighth day of the disease. A layman would hardly have had the opportunity, or indeed the inclination, to make an exact statistical computation, and in this fact perhaps lies this unexpected lapse of Thucydides into subservience to medical orthodoxy.

With regard to the day of death in typhus fever, Curschmann says: 'When death is caused simply by the severity of the disease, it occurs usually in the middle or second half of the second week. A fatal termination before the ninth day, or as early as the fifth or sixth day, occurs only in the most severe forms of the disease, or in individuals with little resisting power.' Now, not only was the Athenian pestilence severe in type, but there was also an almost complete absence of the nursing and medical regimen that will have served to prolong the duration of cases, that have ultimately proved fatal, in recent epidemics. In plague death usually occurs between the second and sixth days, seldom later, and few patients survive to the seventh or ninth day without the appearance of buboes.

If the victims survived this period, the disease fastened on the bowels and produced violent ulceration (έλκωσις). Initial constipation, followed, as the disease develops, by diarrhoea, which is sometimes profuse and intractable, is met with both in typhus and plague.

The disease began in the head and gradually passed through the whole body. If the sufferer survived so long, it would often

<sup>1</sup> *Epidemics*, iii.

seize the extremities and make its mark, attacking the privy parts and fingers and toes. Some escaped with the loss of these and with the loss of their eyes. This terminal gangrene of the extremities is of frequent occurrence in typhus, but is rare in plague, and very rare in other acute infectious fevers. Curschmann says: 'Many patients continue to suffer for some time after defervescence (of typhus fever) from gangrene of the ears, fingers, toes, tip of the nose, and skin of the penis and scrotum, arising during the febrile period.' Gangrenous changes around a carbuncle are occasional in plague, but not as an independent affection of the extremities. Neglected plague buboes, even nowadays in Indian epidemics, do exceptionally become gangrenous, as the result of an intercurrent erysipelas. Necrotic ulceration of the eyeballs is well authenticated as a complication of typhus as well as of plague.

Some recovered from the disease, but with complete loss of memory. This again is a frequent consequence, usually temporary, but sometimes permanent, of typhus. According to Curschmann, 'the patient's recollection of his illness is almost always very limited in severe or moderately severe cases. True psychoses appear to be rare during convalescence. Mild melancholia and hallucinations are sometimes seen, and even mania has been observed.'

The combination of gangrene with mental symptoms inevitably suggests the thought of ergotism (poisoning by a fungus of rye-grain), and Read and Kobert have expended much ingenuity in support of this hypothesis. One of the Athenian corn routes did actually tap the northern shores of the Euxine, and southern Russia has been one of the chief centres of epidemics of ergotism. But there is no need to invoke this condition, to explain symptoms which are commonly encountered in typhus, and no warrant either for so doing, seeing that the clinical features of the visitation had little in common with ergotism. Kobert's ingenious arguments in favour of ergotism, superimposed on some other unidentified disease, merely substitute one *impasse* for another.

Thucydides observes that one feature distinguished the Athenian pestilence from ordinary diseases. Birds and beasts of prey, which feed on human flesh, would not as a rule touch the bodies, but, if they did, they died. In fact, the birds of prey disappeared altogether, and were not to be seen either about the



bodies or anywhere else. In the case of the dogs this was particularly noticeable, because they live with man. The paragraph is curiously involved, but contains three statements of fact :

1. That vultures were nowhere to be seen.
2. That dogs avoided the dead bodies, as a rule, but that, when they did not, they took the disease.
3. That other animals, which feed on carrion, and within the walls of Athens these can hardly have been other than rats and cats, and possibly pigs, were affected like the dogs.

There is no evidence as to the effect on cattle, horses, sheep, and goats, because all these had been removed to Euboea.

The phenomenon of the disappearance of birds of prey before and during outbreaks of epidemic pestilence has been asserted again and again in literature. Yet it is very doubtful if the observation rests on any sure evidence. Search has brought to light only one occasion on which the truth of the fact has been deliberately tested, and then it was directly contradicted. Russell says that at the commencement of the plague of Aleppo, in which true plague was ushered in by typhus, no desertion of birds was observed, and no mortality among cattle. The old-time fancy that pestilence engendered in the clouds distempered the atmosphere almost necessarily involved the presumption that the feathered inhabitants of the air would be the first to feel its ill effects. In the same way the belief that pestilence might reach the atmosphere in the exhalations from marshes, led to similar fables attaching themselves to the marsh-dwelling frog. Aristotle alludes to the increased number of frogs in pestilential years, and Bacon and Horstius repeat his statement. These children of the marsh are conceived of as products of its undue activity. Horstius went so far as to assert the same of snails.

Livy<sup>1</sup> clearly asserts the disappearance of vultures from Rome before and during the epidemic of 174 B.C. 'Cadavera, intacta a canibus et vulturibus, tabes absumebat: satisque constabat, nec illo, nec priore anno, in tanta strage boum hominumque vulturium usquam visum.' [Dead bodies rotted away, untouched by dogs and vultures: and it was generally agreed that no vultures were to be seen either in that or the preceding year in spite of so great a mortality of men and cattle.] In this instance,

<sup>1</sup> xli. 21.

then, it was not that they scented death from afar and held aloof, but that they disappeared beforehand. If some undetected epizootic—say of rats—had preceded the outbreak among cattle and men, the vultures may well have perished at the outset from feeding on infected material.

Other authors extend the observation to birds in general, and not only to birds of prey, as though their affection was truly epizootic. Thus Schenkus<sup>1</sup> says that in the plagues of 1505 and 1522 birds deserted their nests and young ones. Goclenius says the same of the plague of 1612, and that they fell suddenly to the ground dead. Mercurialis says that Venice was deserted by birds in 1576, and Short repeats this of Dantzic in 1709. Diemerbroeck says that cage-birds died in the epidemics of 1635 and 1636, and Sorbait records the same fact of the Viennese pestilence of 1679. Most, if not all this succession of epidemics, were unquestionably true Oriental plague, with or without typhus.

At present there is very little evidence of any extensive affection of the lower animals by typhus. Mosler, many years ago, failed to communicate it to dogs by injecting fresh typhus blood into their veins, or by feeding them on fresh typhus excreta, although death with typhoid symptoms followed, when the blood and stools had first been allowed to decompose. In the last few years experimenters have succeeded in communicating the disease to various monkeys by the agency of lice, but dogs, rats, and guinea-pigs have hitherto proved refractory to infection.

On the other hand, there is abundant evidence of animal infection with Oriental plague. Epizootics among rats and cats are well known. Boccaccio asserted the susceptibility of pigs, and Michoud confirmed the observation in the Yunnan epidemic of 1893. Dogs, poultry, deer, cattle, monkeys, squirrels, and marmots have all been shown by various observers to be prone to contagion.

Before accepting the evidence of Thucydides as to the disappearance of birds as weighty evidence in favour of the presence of true plague, one must consider the state of the country district around Athens, devastated by fire and the sword, and denuded of all its stock, so as to offer no promise of sustenance to bird visitors. But even so, one is still confronted by his statement

<sup>1</sup> *Obs.* p. 870.



as to the domestic dogs, which are known to be susceptible to plague and not known to be susceptible to typhus.

Thucydides says that no one was attacked a second time, or if he were the result was not fatal. Immunity of this kind, comparatively complete, is alike characteristic of typhus and plague: the question is one that has provoked considerable controversy right down to modern times. Both Curschmann and Murchison are agreed as to the extreme rarity of relapses and reinfections in typhus: curiously, Murchison himself had two typical severe attacks.

In the case of plague, Alexander Massaria,<sup>1</sup> from his experience at Vicenza, came to the conclusion that one attack rendered a man immune with very few exceptions, but that a second attack might be mortal. Mercurialis and Van Helmont were in agreement as to the rarity of second attacks. Diemerbroeck<sup>2</sup> recorded two cases of reinfection in the same year of the plague at Nymwegen, and several cases at an interval of a few years. During the plague of Marseilles in 1720, various writers observed cases of reinfection, and relapse was also said to be frequent. In the plague of 1771 at Moscow, Samilowitz, prejudiced by his own advocacy of inoculation, denied the existence of reinfection, and suffered retribution for his dogmatism by three relapses in his own person. In the same plague both Mertens and Orraeus recorded cases of reinfection. In the plague of Aleppo, Russell noted 28 cases of reinfection within three years among 4,400 victims of plague. Thus the idea of complete immunity, so prevalent popularly both in Europe and the Levant, must be accepted with some reservation.

<sup>1</sup> *Tract. de Peste*, ed. 1669, p. 509.

<sup>2</sup> *De Peste*, Lib. IV. Hist. 37. 45.

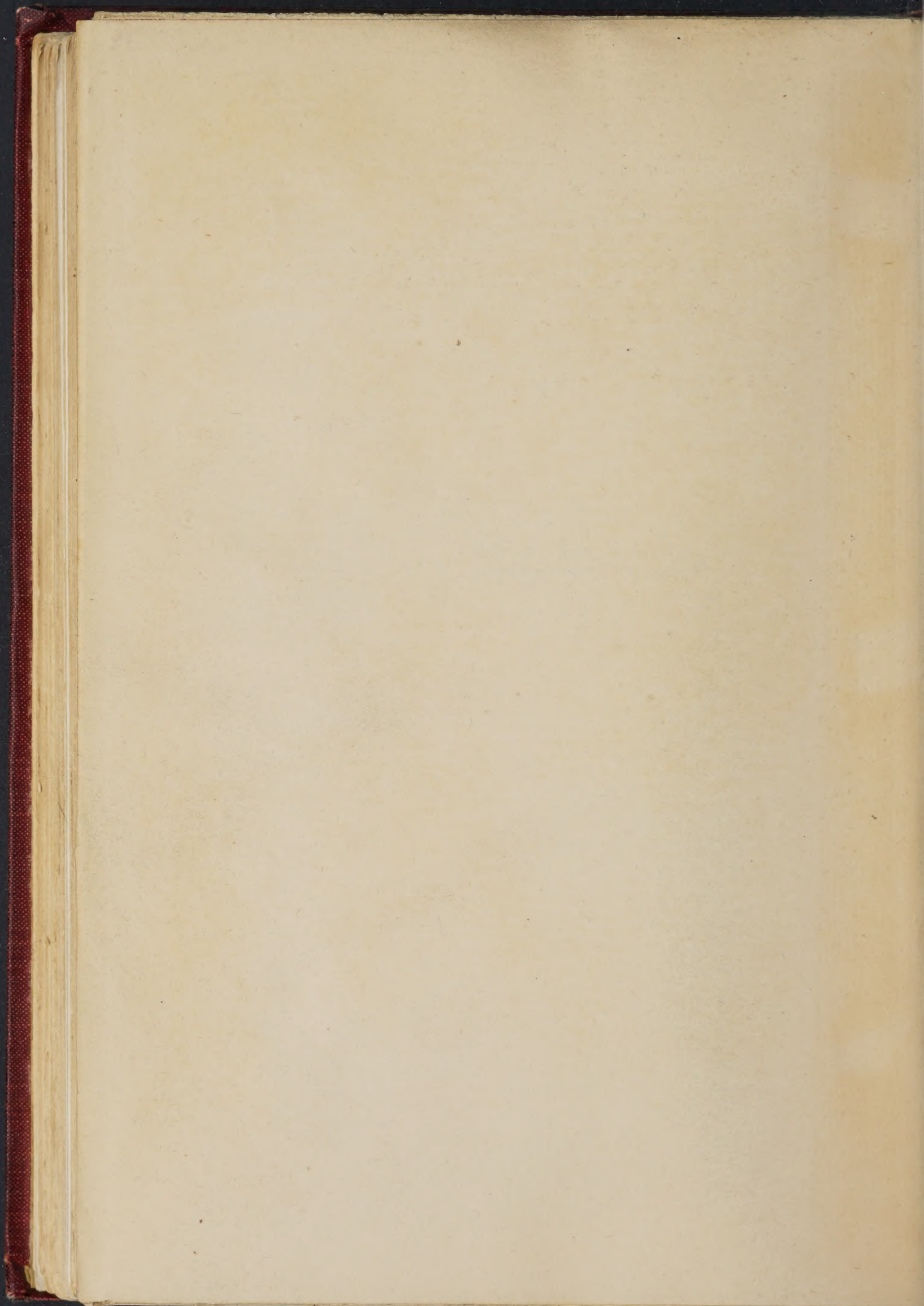




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